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PRIVATE EYE

CONWAY FAMILY VALUES

If they paid me more money, I wouldn't have to be so greedy
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He's a proper Tory MP. He's sleeping with his secretary
Dad's got the sack – and it's full of money

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Gnome

READERS of my newspapers will be sickened by the recent stories of MPs giving jobs to their wives and families regardless of their ability. This is nepotism pure and simple and an affront to the cherished traditions of meritocracy that have made this country the envy of the world.

We are all of one mind here at Gnomes International in unreservedly condemning this sleazy preferment of relatives which has tarnished the reputation of the Mother of Parliament.

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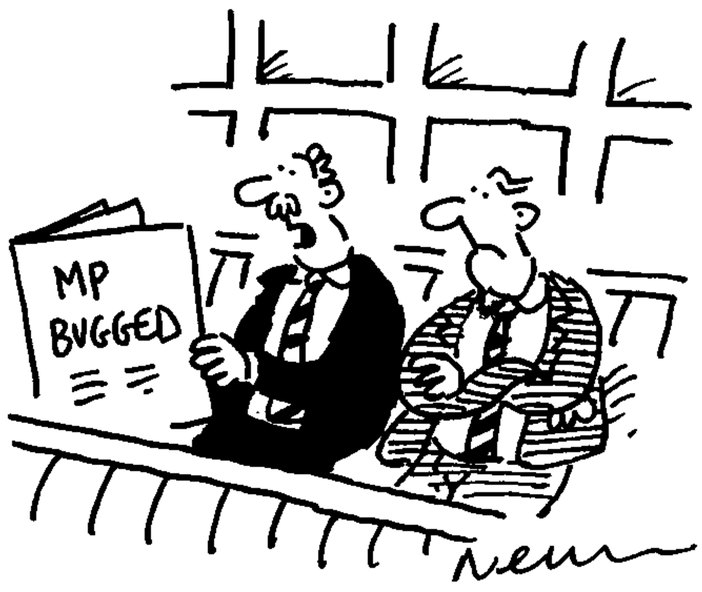

"He's lucky anyone's listening to him"

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ABC

No expenses spared

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"WE'VE too much off balance sheet activity. We've had too little independent assessment of risk," Gordon Brown told a nodding audience in the ski resort of Davos two weeks ago – without blushing.

Nowhere, of course, has this deceitful economic approach screwed things up more than back home. For a decade Brown has forced investment in public services through ruinously expensive private finance initiative schemes just so repayments under most of them (more than £30bn and counting) can be kept *off* the national balance sheet. And the confidence trick behind PFI, as in the financial markets, has been the false assessment of risk: overstating the risk of conventional funding and understating that of PFI – invariably by just enough to make the latter look cheaper (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

As in the financial markets, the PFI chickens are now coming home to roost too. No sooner had Brown returned from Davos than the credit crunch stymied the Ministry of Defence's planned £13bn PFI contract for in-flight jet refuelling aircraft. Ten years (and many millions) after the scheme was first planned, the sudden unavailability of bond finance will push the cost even higher as the PFI consortium led by EADS (the European Aeronautic Defence and Space company) now has to turn to the banks for the cash (or a "more bank-driven solution", as the company puts it). Over-stretched defence spending will no doubt take another hit.

Under the more honest approach to finance – transparent borrowing, on the books – that Gordon now advocates (for everyone but his own government, it seems) the problem would not have arisen in the first place.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£25,970 Salary paid to "all but invisible" Freddie Conway for 17 hours per week as his father's parliamentary researcher

£25,756 Salary advertised for full-time post of "Data Protection and Freedom of Information Co-ordinator" at House of Commons this week

"THE government should bear the Metronet debacle in mind if and when its parent companies next come to bid for publicly-funded work," the Commons transport select committee announced in its report on the disastrous tube PPP, highlighting the Metronet consortium's "pathetic under-delivery".

Scant notice has been taken of this warning, however. Last week, a few days after the report, one of those very parent companies, Balfour Beatty, was handed £360m worth of work on infrastructure for the Olympic park (to go with its £200m contract for the already way over budget aquatic centre).

Metronet's other parents aren't exactly suffering for their tube foul-up, either. WS Atkins is busy designing the Olympic park and EDF Energy is a hot favourite to build the new generation of nuclear power stations Gordon is so keen on. But of course the Metronet pattern – years late, 300 percent over-budget and with the mess eventually dumped on taxpayers – will, er, never be repeated with these.

WHERE exactly did Chancellor Alistair Darling get the "idea" for his pathetic fudge on the taxation of non-domicile individuals? A clue can be found in recent registers of MPs' interests.

It was in fact the Tories who last year came up with the idea of a £25,000 levy on non-domiciled British residents in return for which they would escape any more tax on their offshore income. They calculated (dubiously) that this could pay for inheritance tax cuts. Darling then copied the idea, drawing a line under a five-year "review" of non-dom taxation that, with the growing outcry over inequality, had threatened to hit non-doms in the wallet. The elite non-doms breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The Tories' idea had emerged from the Conservative research department run by MP and banker Oliver Letwin. His office, it turns out, is funded by none other than the industrialist and Tetrapak billionaire Hans Rausing, a British resident who by claiming non-domicile status avoids tax on almost all the £5.4bn fortune he built up from his carton empire.

FAR more disturbing than the bugging of MP Sadiq Khan is surely the fact that the man he was visiting in Woodhill prison, a man charged with no crime in the UK, has now spent 3½ years in a British prison.

Babar Ahmad was first arrested in 2003 over activities on his Islamist website Azzam.com but was released without charge. He was then arrested on a US warrant in 2004, shortly after protesting about injuries he received during his first arrest, and he has been in prison pending extradition ever since, while legal arguments rumble on.

But as *Eye* 1125 reported, Ahmad's supposed "accomplices" in America, named on the affidavit, have already been released without charge. One of them, Muslim businessman Syed Maswood, was even invited to attend a Republican party fundraiser with George Bush – although he told US press he wouldn't be travelling to Washington because he was still struggling to get his name off the no-fly lists.

SPEAKER ON SLEAZE

NEWS

FORKEN HELL

LONDON mayor Ken Livingstone had a tricky couple of weeks thanks to C4's *Dispatches* which revealed his taste for whisky; that the London Development Agency had wasted millions on failed businesses; and that members of his staff (paid for by taxpayers) had worked in office hours on his last election campaign.

But close Ken advisers like Redmond O'Neill, Neale Coleman and Lee Jasper weren't the only ones to breach the 1990 political restrictions regulations which were contrary to the Greater London Authority's employment and conduct codes.

In July 2006, a web company called Unreal was paid by unidentified Ken supporters to set up a website, "londonforken.co.uk" dedicated to Ken's re-election. The name was registered to Mark Watts, the mayor's climate change adviser who had masterminded his 2000 and 2004 election campaigns. For Watts to take such an active role in the campaign to re-elect Ken, while being paid to act as a neutral civil servant, is a clear breach of the GLA's code of conduct.

Watts's explanation of what has been going on is, some may think, itself "unreal". He says registering the site in his name was a "mistake" on the part of Unreal, and he has a letter in which a junior member of staff at Unreal takes full responsibility for the so-called error. But the "mistake" was only discovered six months after the site had gone online – and only after hacks began asking Watts for an explanation.

Nor has any explanation been given as to whether it is appropriate for a web company to be working for Livingstone's re-election at the same time as receiving £260,000 for other work carried out for the GLA. By an amazing coincidence, whole chunks of text from the "londonforken" website appear to be taken, grammatical errors and all, from press releases issued by the mayor's office and paid for by taxpayer. So it looks like Londoners will be supporting the mayor's re-election campaign whether they like it or not.

'Newthound'

JUST weeks after the fiasco of the lost personal data discs, Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is planning to hand over all its security to the *Eye*'s old friends at Mapeley – the offshore outfit that already runs 650 HMRC buildings under the infamous STEPS PFI deal and has since won the contract to run passport interview centres.

Four years ago it emerged that Mapeley had vastly understated the costs of security in its bid for the STEPS contract. The company anticipated the annual bill at £1.25m when the cost was always going to be more like £7m.

With the inevitable shortcomings now being exposed, HMRC refuses to tell the *Eye* what the Mapeley contract demands of the firm by way of security and checks on staff.

"I thought I'd sell mine before the government loses them!"

STREET OF SHAME

OUTRAGE from the *Daily Mail* last week at the revelation that almost 800 public bodies can "snoop" on our phone records or private correspondence.

"Did you believe, in this supposedly free country, that only in the rarest circumstances could anyone be authorised to tap your phone, intercept your emails or open your post?" its editorial asked. "Under this government the balance between state power and individual liberty has been outrageously skewed."

Quite so. Or, as information commissioner Richard Thomas said in 2006: "People care about their personal privacy and have a right to expect that their personal details remain confidential. Who they are, where they live, who their friends and family are, how they run their lives: these are all private matters." He made his comments while publishing an official "league table" of newspapers which had used the services of private investigator Stephen Whittamore to get phone records, bank statements and other illicit data. Top of the league was a paper at which more than 60 different hacks had paid Whittamore for 982 pieces of information over a three-year period. Its name? The *Daily Mail*.

TREMBLING with excitement, the *Daily Star* cleared a whole page for exclusive photos of Sven Goran Eriksson dining with a young woman in a Manchester restaurant.

As one fellow-diner observed: "Everyone says Sven can be a naughty boy and you can see he charms the ladies out of the trees." When they embraced, "his hand appeared to stray towards her bum".

Phwoar! It was only when an irate letter arrived from Sven's solicitors that bumbling *Star* hacks discovered the awful truth: the young woman was, er, his daughter, Lina. In a grovelling apology, the *Star* admits that he was in fact "having a normal fatherly embrace".

SIGNS of tension in the powder room at the *Daily Telegraph* where glamour pusses Celia Walden and Bryony Gordon are in deadly competition for front-page puffs.

Walden, who is being moved from the editorship of her pisspoor Spy diary to become a fulltime feature writer, is said to have "bewitched" *Torygraph* editor Will Lewis who orders that her slender limbs adorn front page puffs in best *Hellograph* tradition whenever possible.

This has caused immense snorting of envy from the well-endowed Gordon, who has gone into overdrive with demands that her features be projected regularly on to the front page and who has a key admirer high up in the *Telegraph*'s online operation (her page hits, consequently, are said to be much greater than those of Walden). Such is the rivalry between the two feisty ladies that *Torygraph* staff now talk openly about "Beauty and the Breasts".

"MORE help for the poor is what we want to hear," Jackie Ashley pleaded in Monday's *Guardian*, demanding that Gordon Brown do something for "people near the bottom of the pile".

Yes, indeed. But mischievous readers have sent the *Eye* a brochure from St Paul's girls' school in London where Jackie and husband, Andrew Marr, are parents. The school recently set up a "development trust" to pay for children from poor families to attend the school and the brochure from the trust reveals that £10m has been raised so far, and lists the 200 parents who have donated. Absent so far, the readers unkindly point out, are those champions of social justice, Ms J. Ashley and Mr A. Marr.

SINCE the *Sunday Mirror*'s splash about Alan Johnson's donor scandal was leading the BBC's news bulletins, it was natural that *The World This Weekend* team should invite Adrian Butler, one of the hacks who broke the story, on to the programme to talk about his scoop.

Quite by chance, listening to the interview in a boozer on the other side of London was a rather shocked Adrian Butler. He made some calls to find out who was masquerading as him and why.

None other, it turned out, than his boss, assistant editor Nick Buckley, who apparently felt it safe to let Butler loose on the paper's front page – but not in a Radio 4 studio.

THE INTERVIEW with Kerry Katona and her husband, ex-cabbie Mark Croft in the *Sunday Mirror* magazine, yielded an important insight into modern morals, when Croft was asked about a story his mother sold to another Sunday tabloid last month. "I won't speak to her any more and she won't see her grandkids again," he declared. "If she can sell me out for 10 grand. What's 10 fucking grand? Obviously, she's got a price and if 10 grand is her price then she can get fucked."

When the interviewer pointed out that Kerry's mum had also sold a story about her daughter, Croft quickly explained the difference: "That was for 70 grand, though. It's still not nice, but mine did it for 10 grand."

WHEN fun-loving *Sun* hack Chris Pharo was promoted to head of news last September he was told that if he "behaved" he could be in line for an associate editor title. But this careers advice seems to have slipped Pharo's mind during a recent evening out with a fellow employee.

Pharo, famously able to stay up all night, emerged unscathed. His companion, however, was so hyped up and unable to sleep she ended up being hospitalised. Worse still, according to colleagues, she had to take the rest of the week off work, bringing part of the operation to a grinding halt.

STRONG words from Alice Thomson about inheritance tax. Writing in the *Daily Torygraph*, Thomson says that although she used to disapprove of inherited wealth and came from a family of humble proles, she has now changed her mind.

"The majority of British philanthropy comes from second, third of fourth generation wealth," she gushes. "Britain would become very sterile if it were composed only of the self-made man or woman." Defending inherited wealth, she adds: "The great estates, passed from generation to generation, are able to take a long term view of the land and the people on it. They are less likely to throw out tenants to make way for gyms in the cottages."

It was surely only shortage of space which prevented Thomson from noting, in her 1,000 word piece, that she married into the landed Devon gentry and that her husband, Edward Heathcoat-Amory, by day a mere *Daily Mail* leader writer, occupies a large chunk of the West Country, complete with servants.

NEPOTISM SPECIAL

● "THE case of Derek Conway, the Conservative MP who has employed his sons on staff allowances at the same time as they were in full-time higher education, is not just a disgrace for one MP. It also shows that both the transparency and enforcement regimes leave a lot to be desired," observed the *Guardian*'s leader column last week.

And quite right too. In future, parliamentary offspring would do well to follow the example of recent graduate Isabella Mackie, who had the grace to use her mother's surname when taking a job on the *Guardian*'s website to disguise the fact that she is the daughter of the paper's editor, Alan Rusbridger.

● "THERE is no excuse for nepotism in politics," thundered the *Times*. "For a Member of Parliament to employ a teenager as a parliamentary research assistant is decidedly odd… That's nice work if you can get it. No other undergraduate could ever have got it, and Conway junior should never have got it."

Naturally appearances by the teenage Anna Stothard in the pages of the *Times* while her father Peter was editor were a different matter – and it would be uncharitable to bring them up since they date from the old regime, before James Murdoch took over the reins at News International from his father Rupert, the culmination of a business career which stretches all the way back to his first internship on one of Murdoch Senior's Australian titles at the age of 15.

● "DISGRACED Tory Derek Conway epitomises everything objectionable about certain MPs," roared the *Daily Mail*. "Some ease their children through university by sneaking them on to the public payroll as 'researchers', asking for little or no work in return… smirking Mr Conway is far from the only MP who has improperly feathered his family's nest."

Mail editor Paul Dacre, of course, had to work his own way through Leeds University, keeping the wolf from the door with regular holiday and gap year jobs on the *Express* – where by an astonishing coincidence his father Peter just happened to be a feature writer.

● "IT IS becoming clear that parliamentarians have been free to plunder taxpayers' money with almost no checks or restraints," foamed the *Daily Express*.

"Even the Commons standards and privileges committee, which is notoriously soft on MPs, was moved to observe of Conway: 'This arrangement was… a serious diversion of public funds'." Even more serious than the diversion, two years ago, of an X-Box games console intended (and offered nonetheless) as the prize in a readers' competition into the bedroom of *Express* proprietor Richard Desmond's teenage son Robert. Will no one think of the children?

LIBEL NEWS

IS IT libellous to say that a top TV star earns loadsamoney? Jonathan Ross appears to think so. His ever-vigilant solicitors, Schillings, sprang into ferocious action two weeks ago when Channel 4 deputy chairman Lord Puttnam told a BBC in-house seminar that the corporation had outbid its rivals by £2m to retain Wossy's services, in the famous deal worth £18m over three years.

As well as demanding an apology from *Broadcast*, which reported Puttnam's remarks, Schillings wrote to all Fleet Street news desks and legal departments warning that it was grossly defamatory to claim that the BBC offered £2m more than rival bidders – and a breach of the PCC code as well. Anyone repeating this monstrous allegation could expect writs.

But why? Are lawyers at Schillings so proud of their reputation as Rottweilers that they no longer pause to think before baring their teeth? Whether or not the figure of £2m is right – Ross insists that rival broadcasters actually offered *more* than the Beeb – Lord Puttnam wasn't criticising Ross or his agent for accepting the deal. (If Ross can afford Schillings' fees, it suggests he *is* very well paid indeed.) If Puttnam defamed anyone, it was the BBC executives who made the offer. So, er, where is the libel?

Still, the threats seem to be working. In last Monday's *Grauniad* the weekly "Media Tarts" comic strip included a joke about the similarity between Jonathan Ross's salary and Jeremy Paxman's pants ("controversial, grotesquely inflated, yet hidden from public scrutiny"). Just before it went to press, however, cartoonist Andrew Birch was ordered to replace "Jonathan Ross's salary" with "a media mogul's salary", thus rather spoiling the gag but delighting the lawyers.

MEANWHILE Schillings has been doing its bit for libel tourism, the pernicious practice whereby rich foreigners who are allegedly defamed in foreign publications take advantage of British libel laws by suing in London, even when there's no discernible UK connection. Amazingly, the client is someone even richer than Jonathan Ross.

Schillings partner Simon Smith has issued a statement boasting of his victory on behalf of the tycoon and politician Rinat Akhmetov, the richest man in the Ukraine, in his action against two editors and a journalist working for the Ukrainian online newspaper, *Obozrevatel*.

Akhmetov had sued over a profile based on interviews with people who had known the 41-year-old mogul in his youth. Last month the high court in London entered a "judgment by default" in his favour, as the defendants refused to answer the claims. "I like London and Tony Blair," said one of them, chief editor Oleh Medevedev, "but I'm a Ukrainian subject to Ukrainian law." A compensation hearing later this year will determine the level of damages.

Akhmetov is based in the Ukraine. So is *Obozrevatel*, which doesn't even publish an English-language version. As a Ukrainian blogger points out, the number of regular *Oboz* readers in London would barely fill the front seat of a London bus. So how can Simon Smith of Schillings justify pursuing this all-Ukrainian dispute in London rather than Kiev? "By seeking redress in the courts of England," he explained when the action began, "Mr Akhmetov will ensure that there will be a fair legal process." Yeah, right: British libel laws are renowned throughout the world for their "fairness".

What Akhmetov *has* ensured is lots of lovely loot for Schillings. And, since the defendants will ignore demands for damages and costs, he'll end up footing the bill. Since he's worth $15bn, no doubt he can afford this little extravagance.

SANDRA Parsons, editor of the featherweight *Times2* features section, wrote a curious column in her own pages on 24 January.

"There is no deadlier enemy for a woman in the workplace," she opined, "than another woman bent on her destruction, especially if the latter has a senior male in whose ear to drip her carefully modulated poison. As men on the whole are both less manipulative and more innocent, he will tend to believe her – and when her victim complains, she will be dismissed with a tutting sound and an admonishment not to be unsisterly. Genius!"

Who could this tirade be aimed at? Surely not her own colleagues, whom Parsons suspects of briefing against her in private meetings with new *Times* editor James Harding?

"I THINK I'm entitled to my privacy. I'd probably back a privacy law like they have in France," announced Ross Kemp recently when asked about his separation from *Sun* editrix Rebekah Wade, perhaps giving an inadvertent clue as to why the couple may have suffered such violent disagreements during their marriage.

One type of publicity he cannot object to, however, is that which surrounded the first episode of his series *Ross Kemp in Afghanistan*. "This Sky One doc is quite simply the best thing on TV for years," declared *Sun* columnist Jon Gaunt, who proposed it should be added to the national curriculum. "Show every child in the land the sacrifice, duty and selflessness of our brave boys... Documentary makers, give up now and forget any ideas of winning awards because *Ross Kemp in Afghanistan* is going to clean up at every ceremony."

"Thank God for Ross Kemp," chimed in fellow columnist Jeremy Clarkson. "I don't know if there's a medal for bravery in the television industry. But if there is, he should get it."

This was in addition to an enthusiastic write-up in the paper's weekend TV guide, a plug in the "what to watch" column, a 1,200-word interview with the "former *EastEnders* hardman" and endless adulatory coverage in sister paper the *News of the World*. The question being asked in Wapping: is this one of the terms of the divorce settlement?

THE *Telegraph, Mail* and *Express* devoted pages last week to their own meticulously researched exposé of some of the stupider responses by contestants on quiz shows – each of which managed to reproduce 26 items which had previously appeared in the *Eye's* long-running *Dumb Britain* column, one complete with the same spelling mistake we cleverly inserted back in February 2002.

JUST FANCY THAT!

Advertisement in Varsity, 28 September 2001

For those who would like to see it done properly, copies of the *Dumb Britain* book, with illustrations by Grizelda, are still available via the *Private Eye* website (www.private-eye.co.uk) at the extraordinarily un-dumb price of just £3.49.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Low-energy light bulbs can trigger epilepsy"
– *Daily Mail,* 25 June 2007

"Energy-saving bulbs 'can cause migraines'"
– *Daily Mail,* 2 Jan 2008

"Low-energy light bulbs 'can damage your skin'"
– *Daily Mail,* 5 Jan

"Free gifts for every reader: 2 Free energy-saving light bulbs"
– *Daily Mail,* 19 Jan

MYSTIC MOGG AWARD

NEWPORT MP Paul Flynn is well on his way to winning this year's Mystic Mogg award. Here he is on 16 January sucking up during Welsh questions to a junior minister on the Ryder Cup golf match to be hosted in Wales in 2010:

"Is he looking forward, as I am, to that glorious day in 2010 — a few months after the next general election, when I, the newly re-elected Member for Newport West will welcome the Right Honorable member for Neath to Newport to congratulate him on his eighth successive year of distinguished service as Secretary of State for Wales?"

Eight days later the distinguished services of the member for Neath, one Peter Hain, were no longer required.

JUST FANCY THAT

"Carrying forward the values and the policies... abolishing child poverty and justice for pensioners"

Peter Hain, BBC News 24

MORE on the slippery lobbyist Steve Morgan, who with equally slippery former lobbyist John Underwood helped derail the parliamentary career of the now pensioned-off former pensions minister, Peter Hain.

Morgan's Cardiff-based lobbying outfit, Morgan Allen Moore, now faces an investigation by the Association of Professional Political Consultants, the self-regulatory arm of the lobbying industry. It is claimed that Morgan's own generous donation of £5,000 to the Hain4Labour campaign was sent from Morgan's Cardiff office to the fake think tank, the Progressive Policies Forum, which miraculously appears to have shared the same address as the London arm of, er, Morgan Allen Moore!

While Steve Morgan may not be quaking in his boots at the interest of the APPC, Inspector Knacker, who is conducting his own inquiries, may wish to ask whether Steve's cheque was effectively attached to a piece of elastic…

THE Conservative party accepted a £25,000 donation from a financial services company last year, just months after it was revealed that the firm had links to the oil industry in Sudan – the same industry that funds the Sudanese militia responsible for genocide in Darfur.

Fidelity Investment Management has given more than £400,000 to the party since 2004. The £25,000 donation was made in July.

Last May, the Tory party described the connection between Fidelity's PetroChina stock and genocide in Sudan as "a highly tenuous link". Yet a Harvard University examination concluded that the link to genocide was strong enough to warrant the "rare step" of divesting its own PetroChina investments.

Fidelity has since sold most of its PetroChina holdings on the New York exchange, but an investigation of worldwide financial filings by American campaigners at the Sudan Divestment Task Force estimated that Fidelity still has $604m invested in PetroChina, mainly via the Hong Kong market.

CALLED TO ORDURE

GORDON Brown's "line by line" parliamentary scrutiny of the new European constitution is proving a ludicrous and scandalous con.

MPs thought they would get to examine the minutiae of the Lisbon Treaty. In fact they are being given just 90 minutes' detailed examination on each vast area of policy – barely a minute for each clause of the document.

The government, frantic to chop things short, changed decades of custom and came up with a dumbed-down system. Each day's business thus begins with a 4½-hour "themed" debate – one day they will talk about the treaty's human rights implications, another about defence, etc. These debates are so wide-ranging they are harmless to the government.

Only when that part of the process has finished can MPs move to the nitty-gritty and consider amendments to particular lines. This bit, which normally would be the whole point of this "committee stage" – and some might say is the whole point of parliament – is given just 1½ hours a day. Brilliant!

Ken Clarke (Con) is pro the treaty but was queasy about this "radical" rule change. Clarke predicted the House of Lords would go bananas when its turn for scrutiny came round. Several of the House's older beasts were also troubled that something called Standing Order 24, which allows emergencies to interrupt government business, had been scrapped. So if something terrible happens, MPs will not be able to stop to discuss it. Goose-stepping Gordon will not permit it!

Had such didactic measures ever been known before? Deputy speaker Sir Alan Haselhurst: "I think the answer to that is no."

In the middle of this saga stands Foreign Office minister Jim Murphy, an ex-insurance company director who looks a bit like Stan Laurel. He has developed a sly habit of praising the House's most notorious bores (eg Bill Cash) and inquiring after MPs' health (to Eurosceptic Ian Davidson: "I hope my Hon friend's leg has improved since Christmas"). Murphy's favourite expression is that "the position is very clear", when of course it is anything but.

Why the terrible hurry to ram the debate through the Commons? Because, Murphy explained, the government did not want a rerun of the Maastricht debate, which lasted so long that MPs "came into the chamber with flasks and sangwiches" (he really does pronounce "sandwiches" like this).

Murphy has allowed so many MPs to trample over him that the House has barely noticed how little he himself knows about the treaty. One day it took him 40 minutes to get through his first paragraph. Every time Murphy tried to start another sentence, several MPs leapt up to interrupt. Murphy's head turned this way and that, like a pedestrian trying to cross a busy motorway.

It was as well that the competent deputy speaker Haselhurst was in the chair, because speaker Michael Martin would have struggled to keep up with all the interventions.

Gwyneth Dunwoody (Lab) left Murphy in no doubt what she thought of the process. It stank. She noted that transport – her special interest – had no "themed debate" of its own, even though it is one of the areas most affected by the treaty. Murphy weakly suggested that she try to raise it in another day's discussions.

In one of the great speeches of the "new" Labour decade, Dunwoody gave the gormless Murphy a lecture about the whole point of Commons debates and why they mattered. "We ought to examine the constant and encroaching demands of European institutions and the way they introduce directives and decide what will happen in so many of our basic industries," she said.

What little support Murphy received came from a dozy Labour backbencher called Miller and from Patricia Hewitt. La Hewitt suggested that opponents of the new debate format were simply opposed to it because it was novel. She thought extended debate could put people off politics. Might her own nannying voice not be a greater disincentive?

Richard Shepherd (Con) told Hewitt that procedures and rules were for the protection of our liberty. Sir Patrick Cormack (Con), normally ultra-polite, told Hewitt that her "patronising" speech was an "insult to the House".

When Shepherd, a day or two later, protested to Commons leader Harriet Harman about the suffocation of debate, he was heckled by Harman's aide Chris Bryant. "Pass the Kleenex!" shouted Bryant, who is best known not for his parliamentary bravery but for posing in his underpants for a gay website. One dreads to think what he normally uses Kleenex for.

His heckling of the veteran Shepherd, who is respected on all sides, was buffoonish and improper. Harman, as leader of the House, is meant to be a non-partisan figure. Bryant, as her PPS, should be above puerile heckling. But hey, it's only the future of national sovereignty.

'Gavel Basher'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Nigel has always campaigned for tougher measures to deter crime and antisocial behaviour… 'Recent tragic cases show that we need to address the problems of gun crime, alcohol abuse, lack of discipline in schools and family breakdown.'"

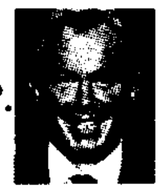
– Annual report from Nigel Waterson MP, autumn 2007.

"Police questioned a senior Conservative MP yesterday over claims that he assaulted his teenage son and daughter. Officers were called to the home of Nigel Waterson, the shadow pensions minister and MP for Eastbourne, at about midnight on Sunday."

– *Independent*, 30 January.

"He loves the sight of his own voice"

THE MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR MAN



SO Swiss insurer Zurich Financial has hired Tony Blair to "advise and collaborate... on its climate initiative". This will puzzle anyone who followed the ex-prime minister's contribution to the climate change debate while he was in office.

Mainly this involved a lot of headline-grabbing but empty gestures: his biggest legacy was a climate change bill that commits the UK to reducing carbon emissions by 60 percent by 2050, but without imposing any annual targets to measure progress (or lack of it). He also signed the UK up to the European Union's 20 percent target for renewable energy but did little to ensure that will ever happen either. Instead, he left Gordon Brown to worry about how to wriggle out of the commitment.

During Blair's time in Downing Street Britain also went to court to demand more carbon permits for polluting industries. And nor did Mr Tony do anything to rein in carbon intensive air transport (a third runway at Heathrow, anyone?) But he did put a lot of energy into one proposed carbon reduction strategy: nuclear power. And it is this policy – his rehabilitation of atomic – that has led to the bumper payday with his new employer. Zurich Financial *loves* nukes.

Its "industry insight" magazine describes how "re-learning how to love nukes" will "save more ice caps". It will also mean lots of potentially huge contracts for Zurich insuring the new generators against the risks of long-term pollution and short-term disaster – contracts that will make a big contribution to Zurich's balance sheet.

Sherwood Boehlert, the US Republican Congressman who sits on the Zurich "climate change" panel alongside Blair, is another nuclear fan. He also has the contacts to help Zurich find its place in the new atomic age. The stakes are potentially huge.

The World Economic Forum's (WEF) *Global Risks Report* (sponsored by Zurich), talks of "an international nuclear fuel insurance fund" to back the international "nuclear renaissance". This fund would be a **"partnership between financial industries and governments to create the world's first international nuclear fuel insurance fund". A slice of such government-backed business would be incredibly valuable to Zurich. Helpfully, Blair was one of the keynote speakers at the WEF shindig in Davos, where he no doubt had an opportunity to discuss his fascinating "climate change" plans with other world leaders.**

WHICH "headhunter" passed Mr Blair's CV to Zurich Financial? Step forward Lord (Sandy) Leitch, former head of Zurich's British operations and one of "new" Labour's most fervent business supporters.

As long ago as 1998, British American Financial Services (led by Leitch) was a Labour donor (*Eye* 963), while Leitch was also active in Prince Charles' "Business In the Community", a key link between Labour and its new friends in business.

Leitch's support for the community included running firms involved in pensions mis-selling on a grand scale (see below). In 2000 he moved to Zurich and his firm became a Labour donor. Leitch was later put in charge of the New Deal Task Force, finding jobs for the unemployed (just as his firm was making redundancies – see *Eye* 1011).

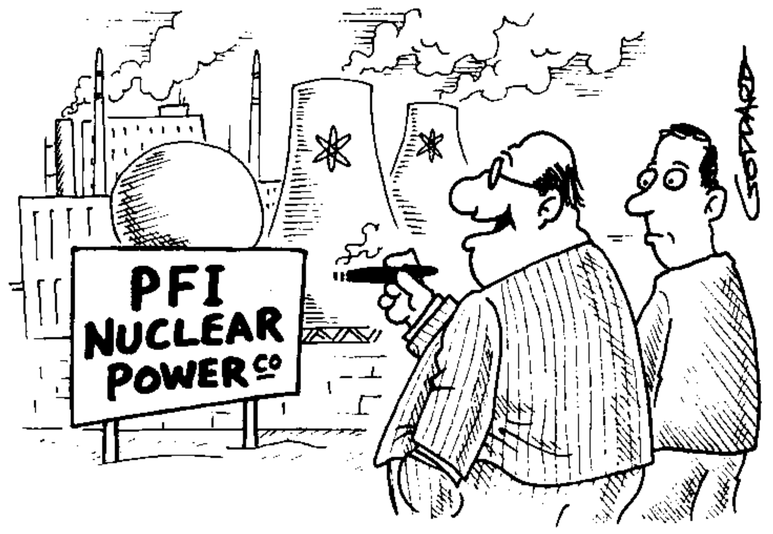
Leitch was friendly with Blair but also close to Gordon Brown. Zurich sponsored the Scottish Politician of the Year awards; and Leitch and his Labour sidekick Wallace Dobbin regularly handed one of their prizes to Gordon in a revolting display of sycophancy (*Eye* 1029). Leitch also gave some of his own money to Brown's leadership election campaign, such as it was.

Leitch's courtship of Labour was driven by a desperate urge to enter the Lords and the story had a happy ending. Leitch got his ermine robe from Blair in 2004... and Blair got his large cheque from Zurich in 2008.

IT'S fitting that Zurich Financial will be helping Mr Blair pay his very large Connaught Square mortgage. The firm's most notable output during the Blair years at No 10 was... duff mortgage endowment policies.

In 2004 Zurich's Allied Dunbar was fined £725,000 for failing to handle endowment mis-selling complaints properly, exposing thousands of customers to losses. The mis-selling itself had spread amid a ballooning stock market and Blair's famous "light touch" approach to financial regulation.

In handling complaints, said regulators, Allied Dunbar "had conducted poor quality investigations and there was a failure to gather sufficient evidence to make a fair assessment". Not the sort of mistake Tony would ever make – unless he was thinking of invading another country.



"Risky? Good lord, no! We're going to make a fortune!"

BARBARA JUDGE plc

WITH a new year comes yet another new job for the ever-frisky "atomic kitten" Barbara Thomas Judge, chairman of the UK Atomic Energy Authority.

She has joined the board of Ethanol Investments plc, a recovering penny dreadful now being relaunched as Evergreen Securities plc in a complicated deal whereby Ben Goldsmith, son of Sir Jams, is injecting £12m into the shell with his cronies.

According to the UKAEA website, Lady Judge has 18 directorships and advisory positions. According to the *Eye*'s calculations, however, this latest appointment brings the total to at least 40. She is deputy chairman of Friends Provident, chairman of Private Equity Investor plc, senior independent director at Quintain Estates and Development plc, a director of Portmeirion Group plc, Hardy Underwriting plc, Victory Corporation plc.

And that's just the plcs. She also graces the boards of institutions in the US, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Turkey, Belgium and Canada. She even finds time to be deputy chairman of the government's Financial Reporting Council – which, ironically, is supposed to invigilate "corporate governance".

Clearly she has ignored recent mutterings from MPs about how on earth she can do justice to so many different employers. And why shouldn't she, when ministers still have the utmost confidence in their favourite businesswoman, aka the Quango Queen?

When Norman Baker MP put down a question last October about "the availability of Barbara Thomas Judge to undertake her functions as chair of the UKAEA", junior minister Pat McFadden replied that "the UK taxpayer is being well served and gets considerably more than the two days per week for which Lady Thomas Judge is contracted". He also insisted that she keeps departmental officials "fully informed" about her other interests.

Last year, despite the criticisms, she took on yet more roles including two lucrative overseas directorships – of the Belgian engineering firm Bekaert and the Toronto-based car-parts manufacturer Magna International Inc. But in contravention of Whitehall rules she didn't declare them on the UKAEA website for many months. Were ministers "fully informed" beforehand about these jobs, and the one at Ethanol Investments? Did they give their approval?

Meanwhile Judge has presided over mounting chaos and plummeting morale at the UKAEA, where more than 80 percent of employees voted for strike action last summer. (They were eventually bought off with a 3.9 percent rise.) Last February the authority was fined £140,000 for releasing radioactive particles into the sea and illegally dumping nuclear waste at Dounreay. A few months earlier it was fined £2m for spilling 58 gallons of radioactive fluid on to a laboratory floor at Dounreay. How much longer can ministers allow this Whitehall farce to run and run?

OUR BOYS'N' THE HOOD

THE Aitken report into deliberate abuse and unlawful killings of civilians in Iraq in 2003-04 is a sterling example of the kind of whitewash expected from the British Army when it investigates itself.

At the core of the abuse was the use of "conditioning" techniques, aimed at softening up internees before questioning by intelligence officers by hooding them (placing hessian sacks over a prisoner's head) or forcing them to stand against walls with their arms outstretched in front of them for long periods.

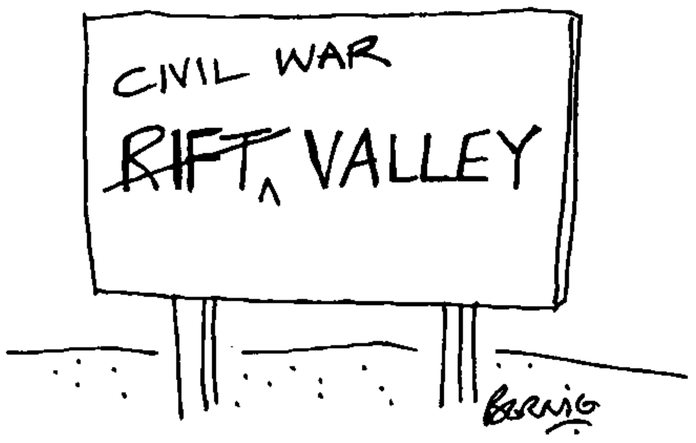
According to Brigadier Robert Aitken: "It was not until 2004, after we became aware of the allegations of abuse, that... formal direction was given to troops in Iraq that hooding should cease." Remarkably, he makes no attempt to explain where the hooding and wall-standing came from or who ordered it.

There were plenty of clues available to Aitken from the court-martial of Queen's Lancashire Regiment (QLR) soldiers for abuse of Iraqi civilians and the killing of Baha Mousa, a hotel worker.

The Aitken report notes that hooding and wall-standing were banned 30 years ago after use by the army in the early 1970s. The techniques were declared to be "cruel and inhumane treatment" by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), in the Ireland v UK (1978) case.

At the QLR court-martial, Brig Euan Duncan, director of the intelligence corps, explained that: "The US had the view that we weren't getting as much information out of prisoners we held as we should, in their opinion." He testified that hooding was considered acceptable and was at the "milder end of the spectrum" of techniques being used by US forces in Iraq. Others included placing detainees in stress positions and sleep deprivation, which they claimed was not torture.

And just where did the Americans get the idea for these techniques they say are "not torture"? According to the legal advice given in the infamous "torture memo" on standards of conduct for interrogation, dated 1 August 2002, from assistant US attorney-general Jay S. Bybee to attorney-general Alberto Gonzales and agreed by President George Bush, it was... from the ECHR decision in Ireland v UK!



MEDIA NEWS

NEWSNIGHT AND THE MOSQUES

SOMEWHERE in London eight British Muslim researchers have gone to ground; and a far-right Muslim outfit that helped fund the Nazi apologist David Irving wants to know where they are. How did this come about? Because no less an authority than the BBC's *Newsnight* had unmasked the eight as "zio-con frauds", as the Muslim Public Affairs Committee called them on its website.

"If you know who they are – please write in and we will expose these men and women for all the Muslim community to see. They worked for over a year on their project, so some Muslims out there must have come into contact with them," wrote the MPAC.

The researchers have an understandable fear that they are about to be "Rushdie-ised" and are furious with the BBC. They offered *Newsnight* an exclusive preview of a report they had helped the Conservative think-tank Policy Exchange produce on extremism in a minority of British mosques. The BBC took their work, sat on it while the rest of the media reported its findings, and then just before Christmas devoted 17 minutes of hard-hitting investigative journalism to, er, ignoring extremist literature and doing over Policy Exchange instead.

Newsnight alleged that Policy Exchange or its researchers had forged the receipts which showed you could buy books spewing out hatred of women, Jews, Christians and moderate Muslims in mosques. The researchers utterly deny any forgery; but the implications of the alleged exposé were explosive: David Cameron's favourite think-tank was apparently stirring up racial hatred with fraudulent evidence.

Furious Conservatives say they've no option but to sue or to take a dossier on Peter Barron, *Newsnight*'s editor, to the BBC's senior management. Either way, the dispute promises to be one of the most vitriolic of 2008, with accusations of racism, bias and incompetence and bad faith from both sides.

For the researchers, however, the implications could be more explosive still; but they can at least see the irony of their position: they are looking over their shoulders to avoid the very extremists *Newsnight* says they invented.

Sadly for the rest of us, the BBC's belief that there's nothing to worry about looks a tad over-optimistic. As the row deepens and lawyers are briefed, the evidence that Policy Exchange was basically right about the extremist literature available is overwhelming.

Newsnight's killer claim was that its hacks had organised forensic tests which proved that receipts Policy Exchange said it had collected from the Muslim Education Centre in High Wycombe were dubious. When Policy Exchange said that the centre was selling such titles as *Women Who Deserve to go to Hell* – for complaining about their husbands and going along with feminist ideas promoted by Jews and Christians – it couldn't be believed. The BBC stuck by the accusation even though the Muslim Education Centre cheerily told reporters that the books were indeed on sale.

Similarly *Newsnight* said receipts from the Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust in west London were suspicious. The implication was that Policy Exchange was lying when it said that the works of Sayyed Qutb, the intellectual father of al-Qaeda and every other supporter of mass murder by suicide bombings, were on sale. Policy Exchange also quoted from a guide for Muslims living in the west which recommended "jihad against the unbelievers and the hypocrites. This kind of Jihad may be by heart, or by abhorring their deeds, by tongue, by finance or by force". A second guide said that Muslims in the west couldn't "stand up to honour a national flag, or a national anthem".

If *Newsnight*'s allegations were correct, the al-Muntada centre should be the innocent victim of a disgraceful smear. But the most basic checks show that it wasn't. At the time the *Eye* was going to press, the al-Muntada online bookshop was offering both guidebooks – while Sayyed Qutb was at number four in its bestseller list!

It doesn't take much to get Conservatives going about the BBC and the darkest conspiracy theories are doing the rounds. They imagine that liberal broadcasters have an hysterical desire to prove their own commitment to multi-culturalism by besmirching the names of anyone who worries about radical Islam and ignoring anything they say.

Hacks, however, have a more cynical explanation. Somewhat foolishly, as events were to turn out, *Policy Exchange* gave *Newsnight* an exclusive preview of its research. The next morning the press covered the report in detail, but because *Newsnight* had refused to touch it, other branches of BBC News in television and radio didn't cover it either.

'Ratbiter'

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£380,000 Cost of rebranding and new station idents for BBC Three

£380,000 Annual salary of the 10 producers whose jobs are being cut from the BBC Natural History Unit

BROADCASTING watchdog Ofcom last month issued its first ruling on the issue of user-generated content – wacky videos made by viewers and uploaded to websites, a number of which are now streamed on cheap 'n' cheerful digital TV channels.

The ruling followed the broadcast on Sumo TV, headed by former *Loaded* editor James Brown, of what it described as "mobile phone video of an adult frightening a young child (approximately five years old)… the child was clearly extremely distressed and started screaming, crying and at one point attempted to run away."

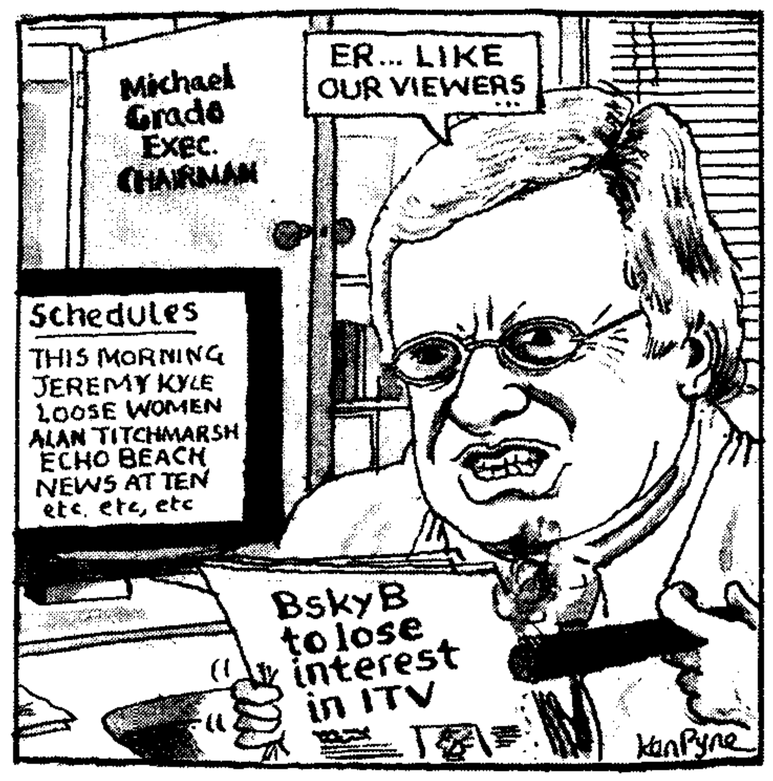
As well as ruling that the clip breached the broadcasting code on three counts, the watchdog issued a note to all broadcasters warning them that "channels broadcasting considerable amounts of user-generated content may attempt to place too much responsibility for ensuring compliance with the code with the individual user" and must perform "robust" checks on anything submitted to them by viewers, despite the fact that this would inevitably "limit the amount of user-generated content it can air".

With an impeccable sense of timing, BBC Three controller Danny Cohen chose the same week to announce the yoof channel's relaunch – sorry, "multi-platform rebirth" – which will involve "handing over some of the channel's airtime to our young audiences – user-generated content will be at the heart of the peak-time schedule".

I-SKY

"You'll have complete access to a treasure trove of resources... Up-to-date Sky News video clips and ICT activities will give you real-life examples to use in your lessons."

– Letter from News International's educational publishing arm Collins, inviting teachers to sign up to a new Citizenship website.



IN December the BBC gave the go-ahead to *Taking the Flak*, a comedy series penned by Tira Shubart, former partner of BBC world affairs editor John Simpson, which is "squarely based" on his experiences.

"It's a bit like *Drop the Dead Donkey* meets *The Constant Gardener* and it's very funny," a BBC insider claimed. "The series really makes fun of what it's like to be a reporter in a war zone."

Slightly too accurately, as it turns out. After months of location scouting, producers hit upon the ideal site for filming: er, Nakuru in Kenya's Rift Valley. With one of their main locations being used as a refugee camp for thousands of Kenyans displaced from their homes and the death count in the country above 850, the corporation's high-risk security team have pulled the production out indefinitely.

It seems unlikely Ruby Wax will be able to film her cameo as an "obnoxious American war reporter" any time soon.

SHOCKED that once-banned video nasties are available on the high street (as, indeed, they have been for some years now), the *Sunday Express* launched a front-page attack on the "increasingly lax standards of Britain's film censors".

"Censors admit these grotesque movies are 'tasteless' but they say they do not deserve to be banned because they are neither illegal or harmful," the paper thundered. "The *Sunday Express* today demands action to sweep this filth off our shelves."

And the highlights from the *Sunday Express*'s sister TV channel, Television X, this week? *Fetish Whores*, *Big Tit Vixens*, *Anal Teens, Hosiery Heels and Holes* and the unforgettable *Icky Sicky Mucky Mingers*...

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which William discovered that blood circulates around the body?

Contestant: Shatner.

Robinson: In film, the western starring John Wayne, James Stewart and Lee Marvin is called The Man Who Shot Liberty... who?

Contestant: X.

Robinson: In the English monarchy, what was the name of the Royal house that succeeded the Tudors?

Contestant: Buckingham Palace.

Radio Merseyside

Billy Butler: What was Hitler's first name?

Contestant: Heil.

AD NAUSEAM

SERIAL advertising offender Ryanair (*Eyes passim*) is refusing to withdraw a press ad banned by the Advertising Standards Authority.

The ad in question offered the "HOTTEST Back to School Fares", alongside a picture of a nubile schoolgirl in knee socks and a short skirt. Once again, the ASA ordered it to take it down, but Ryanair is standing up for its, ahem, principles, saying there is nothing offensive about the ad: "This isn't advertising regulation, it is simply censorship. This bunch of unelected self-appointed dimwits are clearly incapable of fairly and impartially ruling on advertising," said Ryanair's ever-voluble head of communications Peter Sherrard. "Consequently we will not be withdrawing this ad and we will not provide the ASA with any of the undertakings they seek."

The ASA responded in kind: "The noises they [Ryanair] make are tired. We're not going to get in to name-calling or playground tactics," said a spokesman, calling Sherrard's tirade "PR bluster." The offending ad, the ASA went on, can't run again regardless because an alert has been issued to all media owners, all of whom are members of the Committee of Advertising Practice, to shun it. So keep your eyes peeled – should it appear, by oversight or design, the ASA's remaining options against the industry's very own stroppy adolescent are to prohibit media space, invoke pre-vetting or refer Ryanair to the Office of Fair Trading.

THE *Daily Mail* meanwhile seemed oddly reluctant to report the story *(see above)*. "The UK's Advertising Standards Authority yesterday upheld 13 complaints over a Ryanair newspaper advert depicting women dressed as schoolgirls," it said coolly.

"The watchdog ruled the ad 'appeared to link teenage girls with sexually provocative behaviour' and that it was likely to cause offence," the paper added in two paragraphs attached to the bottom of another story tucked away at the bottom of page 26.

Why such reticence from the paper which warned just last year that "sexualised images such as the photos of Girls Aloud posing as 'sexy schoolgirls' are poisoning our culture – and turning every child into a potential sexual target"?

Could it be because the only national newspaper to accept the Ryanair advert and had shamefacedly promised the ASA that it would not run it again, was… the *Daily Mail?*

"I suppose it had to happen"

THE only way to make any real money in adland is to start your own agency. It's a well-trodden route: give it a stupid name; tell everyone you're going to tear up the old-fashioned advertising model; then flog it to an old-fashioned advertising conglomerate a few years later.

This year's most-talked about is a start-up called Adam & Eve. It was founded by the former management team at Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R and has been delighting an adland afflicted with the post-Christmas blues with tales of how A&E will be using "pools" of staff from backgrounds in digital, media, advertising and design, rather than the traditional creative teams.

So busy has Adam & Eve been talking up its digital and new media credentials that it appears to have neglected to check what its own name actually means to those in cyberspace. Type adamandeve.com into your browser and you'll be transported instantly to a world of Loving Heart Vibrating Cock Rings and Temptation Anal Beads. It's a hot shop… but not quite in the way Adam & Eve would have wanted it.

THE BBC, facing a £2bn shortfall in the licence fee and forcing compulsory redundancy on thousands of staff, has nevertheless found the cash to fund a "cut out 'n' keep" aide-memoire for those who survive the cull, entitled: "Who's Who At The Top Of The BBC".

Printed on glossy paper, the A2-sized colour poster has a photo of everyone from Jana Bennett, "Director of BBC Vision", currently forcing hundreds of people through a selection process to see if they're able to keep their jobs, to D-G Mark Thompson who is depicted wearing a pink suit and blue shoes, in the manner of Graham Norton.

But one eminent figure is missing from this gallery of non-entities: the expensive "Creative Director" Alan "Botney" Yentob. According to the BBC Press Office, Yentob is "a celebrated and award-winning programme maker" who "quickly came to personify the creative spirit of the BBC"; but he appears to have been forgotten. What could possibly have happened, asks the legion of BBC employees who are now playing "Where's Botney?" with their colour posters. One unkind theory is that he will edit in a nodding image of himself at a later date.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SO the miracle has happened: Liverpool 08 has launched. And the laconic scouser in charge, Phil Redmond (or Professor Redmond as he now pleases to be known), has been hitting back in his imitable way at the less than ecstatic response to last month's launch.

"Anyone outside Liverpool just doesn't get it," he said – a strangely parochial stance for someone masterminding a project called European Capital of Culture. But an awful lot of people *inside* Liverpool don't get it either.

The hostility between city councillors and the shambolic Liverpool Culture Company set up at vast expense to administer the culture year (and with Redmond on its board) has only increased since the revelation that Liverpool 08 is responsible for £20m of the city's £29m debt.

The Culture Company's wage bill alone is £4.2m. And last week its chief exec, Jason Harborow, who had been forced to resign amid allegations of incompetence, walked away with a pay-off of £230,000.

Where this £20m has gone isn't obvious. The next two months of events on the Liverpool 08 website mostly turn out to be hot air, flannel and tosh.

Events include *The Story of Birkenhead Scouting* and a film show of *The Sound of Music*. Then you get into areas of troubling vagueness such as *Tenantspin,* a project to "launch cultural commentators into the community to provide a medium for the voices of Liverpool to react to 08 events": dates 1 Jan-31 Dec. Or you might try *Waiting*, "a creative health and wellbeing programme focused on waiting areas", dates to be confirmed.

Best of all, though, is *Open Culture,* in which "Professor Phil Redmond" will "open a cultural conversation with, by and about the people of Liverpool to open up new cultural awareness and open access to existing institutions".

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

LUVVIES

And British-born actor Daniel Day-Lewis broke down in tears on America's Oprah Winfrey show.

Day-Lewis, 52, who was meant to talk about his Oscar nomination for There Will Be Blood, sobbed: "I would have liked him [Heath Ledger] very much as a man if I had met him. I feel very unsettled."

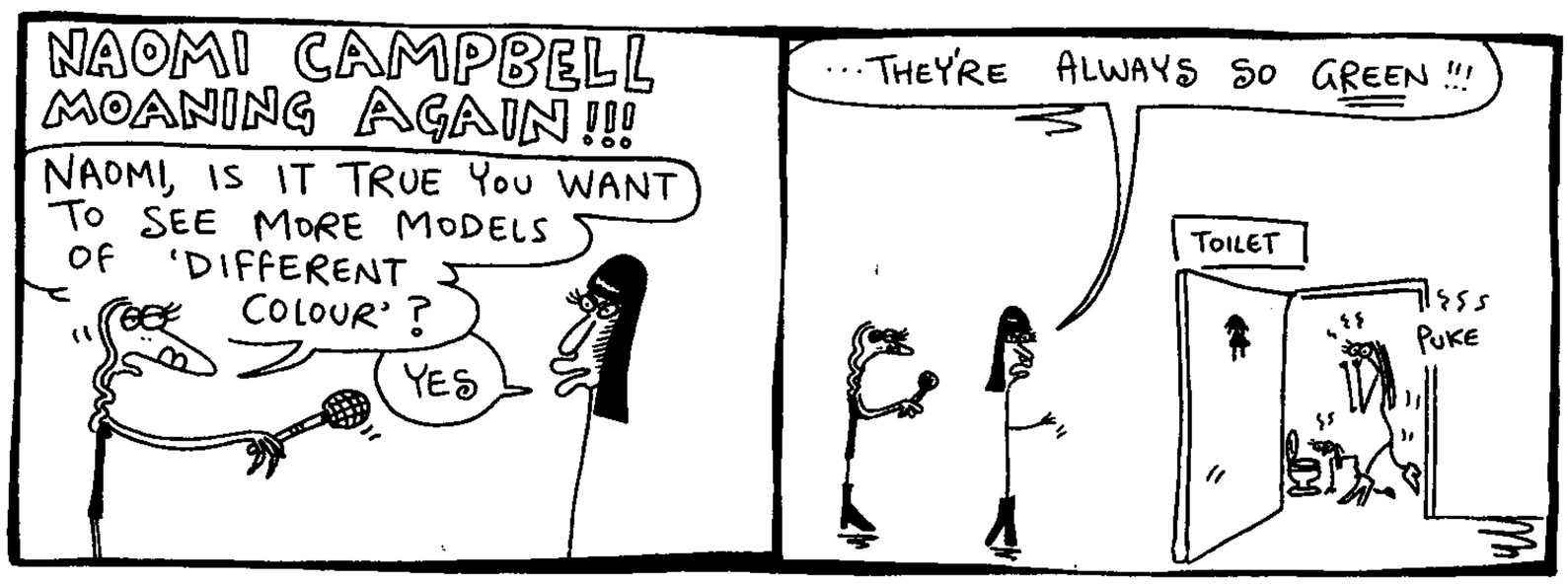
News of the World

Submitted by Steve Harris.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


NAOMI CAMPBELL MOANING AGAIN!!!
NAOMI, IS IT TRUE YOU WANT TO SEE MORE MODELS OF 'DIFFERENT COLOUR'?
YES
...THEY'RE ALWAYS SO GREEN!!!
TOILET
PUKE

Down on the Farm

THE RSPCA won much supportive publicity last month following its rescue of 111 horses and donkeys from a farm near Amersham in Buckinghamshire.

After a call to the charity's helpline from a member of the public led to the discovery of 32 dead horses at the site by one of its vets, Nic de Brauwere, the surviving animals were taken to the animal sanctuary where he works in Norfolk.

Despite the success of this gruesome operation, however, it was not quite enough to outweigh the less favourable coverage given recently in this column and elsewhere to cases where the RSPCA has been sharply criticised by the courts for the methods it used to bring animal cruelty charges on the basis of evidence shown to be so flawed the courts had to throw the cases out.

In Portsmouth and Harwich before Christmas, for example, the RSPCA was condemned for concocting evidence in ways which are unlawful, such as "coaching witnesses" and rewriting their statements to support lurid claims not borne out by the facts.

Less than two weeks after the Amersham raid hit the headlines, the RSPCA brought another cruelty case: this time against Martin and Gina Griffin, who kept three horses in a village near Norwich. An RSPCA inspector, John Jenkins, told the court how, 15 months ago, he had found Florry, a 24-year-old pony, in an "emaciated" condition "with bones protruding", and removed the supposedly neglected animal to Mr de Brauwere's sanctuary.

The 12 charges brought against the Griffins included failure to provide the horse with proper food or veterinary treatment. As is now familiar in such cases, the RSPCA ensured that this horror story was given considerable local publicity. When the defence came to reply, however, the facts began to look rather different.

The Griffins' vet, Charlotte Mayers, testified that their three horses were all well looked after. The much-loved pony, which had been in the family for 20 years, was not emaciated but suffered from laminitis, an inflammatory disease which, she had advised the couple, required its weight to be kept down.

Mrs Griffin had tried to explain this to Mr de Brauwere but, as he himself told the court, he did "not want to enter a long debate" and walked off. Also appearing for the defence was Colin Vogel, an expert on equine welfare and author of the RSPCA's own Horse Care Manual, who confirmed Miss Mayers' diagnosis and stated that the pony had not been suffering.

At the end of a three-day trial, Judge Philip Browning delivered a withering verdict on the conduct of Jenkins, de Brauwere and the RSPCA. "It seems pretty clear," he said, that "Inspector Jenkins had made his mind up" to seize the animal, regardless of any expert opinion such as that of the vet on whose advice the Griffins were acting. The case should never have been brought.

Mr and Mrs Griffin were subsequently re-united with Florry, whom they had only been allowed to see once in 15 months, when the RSPCA wanted to put the horse down. Compared with the £100m poured into RSPCA coffers last year by members of the public, the bill for this dismal episode (estimated at £70,000) may seem tiny. But even some supporters might now be worried how often nowadays this supposed charity bids for publicity by bringing cases which crumble apart in the courts, supported by manipulation of the evidence so blatant that, increasingly, judges and magistrates are finding it hard to conceal their impatience.

'Muckspreader'

DISABILITY RIGHTS & WRONG

IN 2005 the government promised "a full programme of action to support disabled people in leading independent lives. This will lead to significantly greater participation and inclusion of disabled people in the economy and in society."

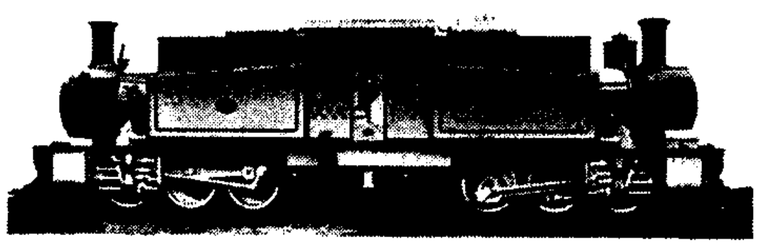
So what has happened since?

Just before Christmas the Independent Living Fund (ILF), which distributes government funds for disabled people, wrote to directors of social services explaining that to cope with "overriding budgetary pressures" it would have to change the criteria for help.

The ILF explained that due to a sharp rise in the number of applications, it would no longer be able to provide money to everyone who qualified and would have to prioritise people who work more than 16 hours a week and those with higher independent living costs and lower incomes.

It also upped the "threshold sum" – the amount a disabled person has to be receiving from the local authority before they are eligible for ILF money – from £200 a week to £320. This move will leave many with no support at all, as social services try to ensure that those most in need reach the threshold.

The move is unexpected, as just last year the Department for Work and Pensions hired consultants to review the Independent Living Fund. One major conclusion was that the local authority contribution should remain at £200, since raising it "could exclude significant numbers of people from ILF entitlement, with no guarantee of their needs being met elsewhere".



SIGNAL FAILURES

Wessex maniacs

FIRST Great Western managed to fend off planned protests by London commuters living in Oxfordshire and Berkshire last week by offering higher season-ticket compensation for delays. But the "fares strike" still went ahead in the Bristol and Bath area. Why?

FGW is really a franchise of two halves: the London commuter and inter-city services which are poor; and the regional services for the south-west which are even worse. The culprits (the Labour government, FirstGroup and Network Rail) know they can only get away with so much on services to and from London, where significant concessions have been made since FGW's unpopular new timetable in December 2006. But in the other half, which covers the south-west, Labour has shortened trains to save cash. Staff shortages and train or infrastructure "faults" are so common here that FGW routinely cancels services or terminates them prematurely.

The protesters' fake tickets last week were branded "cattle class". In fact farmers would be prosecuted if they dared transport livestock in the conditions FGW passengers have to endure. One *Eye* reader recently encountered a train of half the required length on the Portsmouth-Bristol line: "It pulled into Bath completely full and passengers were asked not to board but to wait another hour. Unsurprisingly they piled on, and the guard was unable to get on his train. The police had to be called to remove passengers so the guard could get on. This sort of thing is a daily occurrence somewhere in FGW land."

Such problems were predicted back in 2005 (*Eye* 1156). Hampshire council voiced "serious reservations" over planned cutbacks on the Wessex part of the new "greater western" franchise, but Labour went ahead with savage rolling-stock cuts anyway: comfortingly for ministers, overcrowding is monitored only on London routes. Despite passenger revolts in January 2007 and again this year, another 28 long-distance carriages are being removed from FGW's main Wessex routes.

Britain's "regional" railways have needed subsidy for decades – £57m for Wessex routes the year before they became part of the wider FGW franchise from which the company must generate a £1.3bn surplus for the government (as well as profits for FirstGroup shareholders). With so much cost pressure, it was inevitable Wessex services worsened while fares rocket.

Last week's calls from protesters for the government to terminate the franchise were so unrealistic FGW denigrated protest organisers for their "publicly stated agenda of the re-nationalisation of the railways". It seems that demanding reasonable public services is tantamount to subversion today.

IN JANUARY last year FGW said: "Bringing the maintenance of our fleet in-house will be better for our customers." ***Whoops!***

Wessex trains became much *less* reliable after FGW began maintaining them in Bristol; its crappy Pacers becoming Britain's least reliable train. And what has partly filled the void left by the recent removal of scores of long-distance carriages from FGW? Er, *more* Pacer trains!

FirstGroup has now washed its hands of two fleets of diesel trains it ordered a decade ago but which were always unreliable in its hands. One fleet, tailor-made for FGW, is being returned to the leasing company; while the other's lease has been transferred to Arriva Trains Wales, where (surprise, surprise), with FirstGroup out of the picture, reliability has suddenly improved.

'Dr B. Ching'

"Congratulations! You've won our 'best value' contract for elderly care"

AIR RAGE

TRANSPORT secretary Ruth Kelly's glossy "consultation" document on Heathrow expansion is designed to consult the locals... but only until they give in and accept a third runway. This is especially clear in the way the consultation brochure rests heavily on the Eddington Transport Study.

The Department for Transport insists: "Eddington is equally clear that seeking artificially to constrain the natural growth of aviation... would pose a significant cost to the UK economy." Kelly's department is also excited that Eddington is found "referring specifically to Heathrow". Eddington says: "Even once users pay the full environmental costs of their journeys, there will remain a strong economic case for an additional runway."

If Eddington says a third runway will be green and economic, who are we to argue? Oddly, Kelly's brochure never reveals the identity of the all-wise Eddington. Perhaps because he is none other than Rod Eddington, who was chief executive of British Airways – one of the airlines backing a third runway – from 2000 to 2005.

Eddington is now Brown's transport adviser, after he impressed Gordon with his skills in provoking (and losing) strikes on two continents and for slashing an Australian airline to bits for Rupert Murdoch (*Eye* 1129). So much for "consultation".

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CLASS DISMISSED

ST GEORGE'S Catholic primary school in Little Hulton, on the outskirts of Salford, is oversubscribed, gets good results and has fantastic Ofsted reports. So Salford city council has decided to close it.

A consultation showed a huge majority of parents wanted it to stay open, but this cut no ice with the Labour-controlled council.

The "Justice4Georges" campaign to save the school is organising a march and demonstration on 24 February from the local church to the school, with about 400 children expected to take part. But when the headmaster, Philip Harte, asked the council for permission to march, he received an email from "Urban Vision", Salford's fancypants name for what used to be the "department of works", now run as a "partnership" between the council and a subsidiary of Crapita. It quoted a bill of "around £2,500" for "traffic management" if the demo was to be allowed to go ahead.

The bill was broken down as follows: "Road closure order x1; Manpower x 6; Signage x 12; Cones x 50; Vehicles x 2 (with drivers)."

The council at first fended off protests about the bill by claiming it had "made no decision either way" – but late last week it confirmed that it did indeed intend to charge 400 children £2,500 for protesting about the closure of their school.

PS: When 20,000 police marched through the centre of London last month on their pay protest, Westminster council didn't charge them a penny.

PPS: The children of St George's are not surprised at the money-grubbing schemes of Salford council. Several years ago the council took away the school's football field and rented it out... to a sheep farmer.

RED-FACEBOOK

ATTEMPTING to use the interweb-thingy to get down with the kids has proved embarrassing for Gordon Jenkins, a Conservative member of Bromley council.

Having discovered Facebook, Cllr Jenkins filled his profile page, alongside the "Back Boris" and "Conservative Party News" links, with amusing applications such as "Kinky Poke", "Flirty vs Frigid", "Panty Raid" and "Rate My Body". He then set about "spanking" and "sexy-poking" his friends. Having taken the "What Sex Toy Are You?" quiz, it emerged that the Tory councillor was, er, a pair of edible nipple tassels.

Alas, following an outbreak of apoplexy among Bromley Conservatives, Jenkins has removed the smut and replaced it with a terrifying picture of himself and... Baroness Thatch. Kinky or what?

● BACK in 2005 we noted an encouraging improvement in relations between the organisers of the Glastonbury festival and Mendip district council in Somerset. The annual invasion of drugged-up deadbeats, noise, vandalism and theft annoys many locals and their councillors, but *Eye* 1141 reported how big-hearted Melvyn Benn, the festival licence-holder, had generously passed a pair of FA Cup final tickets, worth £2,000 on the black market, to the council's senior environmental health officer, Chris Malcolmson, at face value. Malcolmson, it so happens, was the man whose approval is crucial to Glasto's annual licence application being passed. Any suggestion that the arrangement was inappropriate was roundly dismissed. Not that it matters any more. Mr Malcolmson has now left the council and has a new job... with Glastonbury Festivals Ltd.

BISH, BOSH, NO DOSH

WILL trendy architect Frank Gehry's monstrous 750-flat "Faulty Towers" scheme ever rise to blight the skyline of Hove? Things – happily – are not looking too propitious.

As *Eye* 1189 revealed last year, developer Josh Arghiros's company hasn't actually got the dosh to build the ghastly thing on the site of the decrepit seafront King Alfred sports centre, although he can afford the odd 50 quid to bribe students to "demonstrate" in favour of it outside the town hall and shout down opponents (*Eye* 1191). Vital to the King Alfred scheme paying its way are attempts to get punters to buy flats "off plan" in advance – not a very enticing prospect with property prices on the slide. It must all be rather worrying for Southern Housing, the "key partner" which will supply the "affordable" housing element of the project.

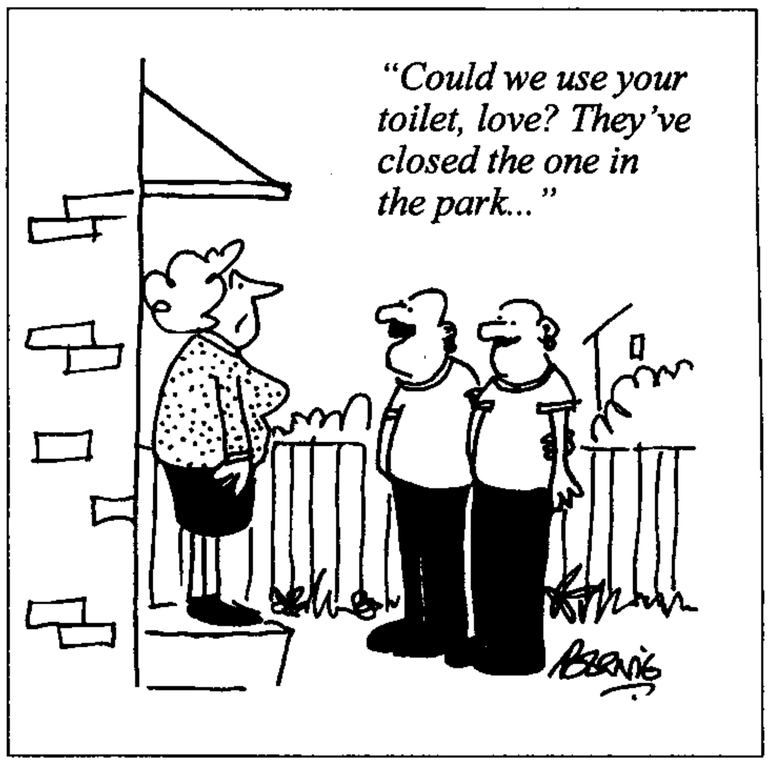
Questions are still being asked about why the outgoing Labour administration in Skidrow-on-Sea was in such a hurry to rush through planning permission for Faulty Towers days before losing power last year – especially since it emerged that three senior planning officers who put their serious reservations about the scheme in writing were taken off the case and have since all left the council [do get in touch, guys!].

Bafflingly, Skidrow-on-Sea's new Tory leader Brian Oxley, who loudly opposed the King Alfred scheme while in opposition, has refused to release the dissident planners' letter because it might "damage public confidence in the planning system". As if the residents had any such confidence in the first place!

YOU'RE NICKED

NEWHAM'S parks constabulary, aka the Keystone Kops, have demonstrated once again how fitted they are to lead the fight against yobbery in the east London borough (*Eyes passim*).

With one of their number still suspended following a brawl at the Keystones' Christmas bash, mayor Sir Robin Wales's private militia are now under a cloud of suspicion following a spate of thefts at their depot. Items stolen include laptops and a top-of-the-range satnav system.



In the latest incident a "constable's" locker was broken into and £900-worth of cash and valuables taken. Meanwhile the Keystones' former senior officer, "Inspector" Michelle Bacon, who quit last year after complaints that she had racially abused underlings (*Eye* 1196), has been quietly rehired to work elsewhere in the council's aptly named antisocial behaviour unit.

So pissed off with the Keystones is local Met chief inspector Ian Dickson that he has told them not to get involved in any incidents outside the borough's parks. As he puts it: "I don't care if you witness a f***ing murder, get on the phone, dial 999 and wait for a real copper to deal with it." Evenin' all!

LOST VOYAGER

THE shambles of Birmingham city council's pay review (see last *Eye*), under which thousands of workers are suffering pay cuts, goes hand in hand, it will not surprise readers, with Britain's biggest local authority's love affair with Capita plc. ("Pay cut", by the way, is not a phrase favoured by managers. The correct expression these days is "negative progression".)

In April 2006 the Tory/Lib Dem administration signed a 10-year contract worth £475m under which Crapita would lead a "transformational agenda" which would save the council £1bn over 10 years. In June last year another deal was signed, worth £142m, under which the council's IT would be revolutionised by a system called Voyager. So far, however, notable "transformational" changes have included:

- Failing to pay 30,000 bills as the Voyager invoice scanner didn't work properly, leading to threats of legal action from unpaid suppliers and bringing in bailiffs to seize council property;
- Children's homes staff forced to use their own money to buy food for children in their care and then waiting months to be reimbursed;
- Bailiffs arriving at a neighbourhood housing office demanding unpaid rent;
- Voluntary organisations owed money by the council not being able to pay staff;
- Suspension of delivery of newspapers and magazines to council libraries because suppliers hadn't been paid;
- Hundreds of customer services staff being told their jobs were being transferred to India and Scotland, when it had been promised that Crapita's involvement would create thousands of new jobs;
- Thousands of council taxpayers having direct debits taken four days early, incurring unexpected bank charges.

But at least one supplier has been paid promptly and efficiently. In addition to its two big contracts worth £617m, Crapita and its subsidiaries have trousered £20m in "consultancy" fees in less than three years. Trebles all round!

● ACRONYM of the year, surely, from Oxfordshire county council, which is justly proud of its new "Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy" for the town of Witney, or, as the council puts it, WITLUS, for short.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

JEZ, WE CAME OVER AS SOON AS WE HEARD! HAS QUIN REALLY BEEN INVOLVED IN A CRASH?!?
YES, WE'RE NOT SURE IF HE'LL PULL THROUGH. THE WHOLE INCIDENT HAS BEEN TERRIFYING!!!
AS SOON AS I INSERTED MY DATA STICK THE SCREEN WENT BLANK - YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MANY POLENTA RECIPES I'VE LOST!!!
GASP!
FILE DELETED

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

OUR shameful MEPs have supported an undemocratic move by their president, Hans-Gert Poettering, to crush any opposition by re-interpreting the parliamentary rules.

Fed up with calls for a treaty referendum by MEPs using a one-minute speech slot, Herr Poettering requested the chairman of the constitutional affairs committee to change the rules so he could stop such speeches at will.

Without more ado, our MEPs rushed to approve the measure – except for a few, including MEP Daniel Hannan, who made the somewhat unfortunate comparison with the 1933 Enabling Act allowing Hitler to take over parliament.

Such a horrific reminder led for calls not for Herr Poettering's dismissal, but for Mr Hannan's expulsion from his party, inaptly named the European People's Party (EPP).

BELGIAN police have at last agreed to return the documents of investigative journalist Hans-Martin Tillack, whose entire files were seized following his exposé of massive looting of EU funds in Eurostat in 2003.

Following false allegations of bribery by EU officials, the EU's incompetent anti-fraud office, Olaf, failed to investigate the alleged fraudsters but ordered a raid on Tillack's home by Belgian police.

After four years of attempts to recover his files, Tillack won a case against the Belgian police last year in the European Court of Human Rights, which ordered Belgium to pay his costs (€30,000) and moral damages (€10,000). The European Commission and OLAF said the case had nothing to do with them.

EU-phemisms

"We are all agreed"

None of us knows what the hell to do

CYNICAL opportunism is the order of the day at the UK Independence Party, where leader Nigel Farage has ruled that no money should be spent on campaigning for a British referendum on the substitute EU Constitution, known as the Lisbon Treaty.

At a national executive meeting last month, Farage said UKIP should instead wait until the treaty is "rammed through without a referendum" which will leave the party "in a good position to take advantage". In other words, the resulting Euro-brouhaha in the run up to the European parliament elections in mid-2009 will ensure Farage a high media profile and subsequent re-election.

NOOKS and CORNERS

MODERN architects, don'tchajustluv'em? They tend to think that to use a Classical column should be a capital offence; and many of them still trade on the moral capital acquired way back in the 1920s by the pretensions of the pioneers of the Modern Movement.

They maintained that their style was healthy, progressive and would transform society. But any such moral capital was exhausted long ago: just look at the way Modern Architects shamelessly suck up to the Chinese, for example, in the hope of designing an airport or re-planning a chunk of Peking for the Olympic Games.

A case in point is Norman Foster (or Baron Foster of Thames Bank as he now is), who has Beijing International Airport in the bag. Of course some readers may fall for the Foster hype and fail to appreciate that the ruthless commercial international design machine to which our Norman gives his name is responsible for an increasing number of mediocre and rebarbative development schemes. But Milord Foster's spotless reputation lost some of its lustre when he designed a Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (*sic*) in Astana for the dictator of Kazakhstan, followed by an enormous "entertainment centre" in the same benighted capital (Eye 1174).

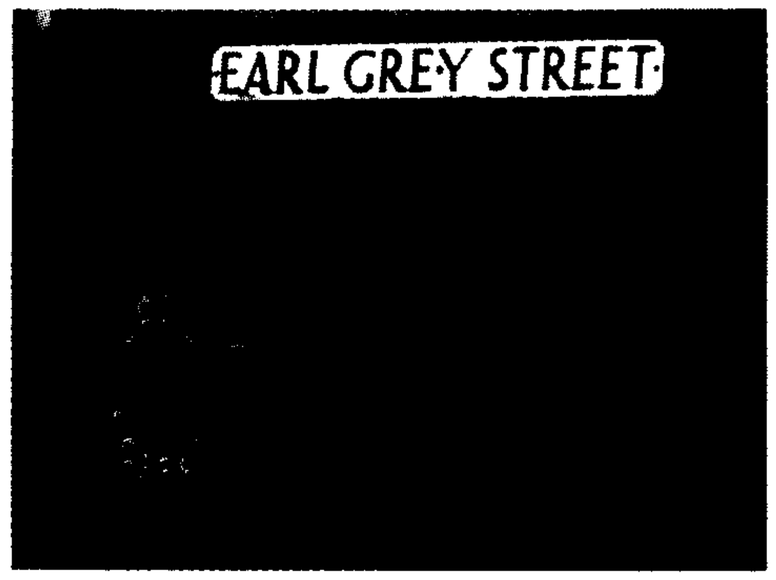
I am pleased to report that the Foster & Partners scheme for the centre of Ealing (see *Eye* 1199) is now running into trouble. And I am also delighted to learn that the Bishops Square development in Shoreditch on which Foster & Partners is working for Hammerson plc is provoking strong local opposition too.

This is part of the huge Hammerson City Fringe Masterplan for redeveloping land around Shoreditch High Street and on the site of the old Bishopsgate goods station – part of the unhealthy cancerous growth of the City of London which, with luck, the coming recession might check. However, the Foster design for Bishop's Square, which includes a 53-storey tower, has been criticised even by the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE), which declined to recommend it for planning permission, commenting that "the failure to relate to the inherent grain or character of South Shoreditch in terms of use and scale represents a fundamental flaw in the proposals" and that elements of the design are "manifestly unsuited to their context".

Part of that context is No 233 Shoreditch High Street, a former (and early) electric generating station which has been restored as a bar and restaurant known as The Light. The Foster scheme requires its demolition; but the owner, James Goff, is fighting back and has mounted the Save the Light campaign, supported by the Hackney Society. Good luck to him. "Planning is supposed to be a democratic process," he says. "We don't want a policy where you knock everything down." Quite.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Edinburgh*



Submitted by Graeme Sharp.
£10 paid for similar submissions.
(SAE required for return of photographs)

Letters

Private Eye

Gnome fires back

Sir,

It is sad to see Private Eye lining up behind Scotland Yard, MI5, MI6, GCHQ, Buckingham Palace and the legal Establishment in the matter of the inquests into the deaths of Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Al Fayed and sadder still to learn that your court correspondent hasn't a clue... ***[Apologies. This letter continued at some length but had to be cut on the grounds of boredom. Ed.]***

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL COLE,
Spokesman for Mohamed Al Fayed,
The Chairman, Harrods Limited.

Lookalike

Liberace

Conway

Sir,

I couldn't help noticing the astonishing resemblance between Henry "blond, bouncy and one for the boys" Conway and another man quite happy to shell out large amounts of money to young male employees who appeared to do very little in return...

ENA B. SEEINGYOU,
Via email.

An ex-husband writes...

Sir,

Regarding the recent interview (Diary, Eye 1201) with Janet Street-Porter: was this a spoof?

Yours,
TIM STREET-PORTER,
Los Angeles, US.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Part-time loather

Sir,

What do you mean, Robin Stewart was "... a violent and sometimes *racist psychopath" (Eye Told You So [Again], 1202)? Tattooed with a swastika and Column 88, there's no "sometimes" about it! And although your point regarding the C-Nomis project is valid, it was a well-known fact that prison officers often put similar cell mate combinations together for the fun of seeing what happens. Come to think of it, I'm sure it was an Eye passim where I picked up the information. I sincerely hope that your memory's not going.*

Yours faithfully,
JEANETTE ANGEL (Mrs),

Stowmarket.

DID not either

Sir,

Re "Ritual response" (Letters, Eye 1202). No professionally carried out, peer-reviewed research in any part of the world has produced evidence to substantiate the existence of ritual abuse. If ritual abuse does not exist, how can Dissociative Identity Disorder result from it? Perhaps this is why in 50 years there is no reputable research supporting DID either.

JEAN LA FONTAINE,

Via email.

Sir,

In their letters responding to critical comments about Valerie Sinason in "The devil's in the detail" (Eye 1201), both Ellen Lacter, Ph.D. and Remy Aquarone (Letters, 1202) cite The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association to support Sinason's claim that dissociative identity disorder is caused by satanic ritual abuse and is in good standing in the United States.

They are wrong.

Sinason's belief that satanic ritual abuse is a cause of dissociative identity disorder has been thoroughly discredited. That notion was discredited in the mid-1990s after several major studies failed to find any evidence for the existence of ritual abuse cults, and a host of other studies demonstrated the ease with which false beliefs can develop, especially in some suggestive therapeutic environments. The book they cite (DSM) alerts users to the fact that it only describes illnesses, not their causes.

In a carefully controlled 1999 survey published in the American Journal of Psychiatry, Harvard professor Harrison Pope and colleagues demonstrated that there is little consensus regarding the diagnostic status or scientific validity of dissociative amnesia and dissociative identity disorder among board-certified psychiatrists.

Uncritical belief in the existence of ritual abuse cults by some therapists has destroyed thousands of families and harmed thousands of patients. Million dollar awards to former patients dampened that belief in the United States in the 1990s.

Sincerely,
PAMELA FREYD, PH.D.

Executive Director, False Memory Syndrome Foundation, Philadelphia.

Parry match

Sir,

I'm mystified by Lunchtime O'Boulez's negative reaction to several recent National Opera productions (Eye 1201). Maybe conductor David Parry's description of opera critics being "prissy and weird" has some justification?

Yours faithfully,
ANTHONY G. PACKMAN,

Horsham.

Private custody

Sir,

It is wrong for you to suggest that injustice is taking place, or that evidence is going unchallenged in child custody cases (In The Courts 25 Jan) as a result of the government abandoning plans to allow the media to publish family court reports. These sensitive cases are perfect fodder for a tabloid feeding frenzy of distortion, harassment and potential harm to children, parents and social workers – rather than the "public scrutiny with identity protection" claimed. History tells us that unnecessary distressing details and names will be leaked, contempt laws flouted and lives ruined by unscrupulous hacks unencumbered by the impotent and toothless Press Complaints Commission. The government has rightly ruled in favour of protecting the long term interests of children's welfare rather than promoting short-term puerile voyeurism.

STEVEN WALKER,
Senior Social Work Lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University.

Lookalike

Sir,

Re the exciting new management team at Newcastle Football Club.

I wonder if you have some photo-graph in your extensive sporting archive of Kevin Keegan and his new Technical Director Dennis Wise to illustrate this dynamic new collaboration.

Krankies

Management Team

Yours,
GERRY MULHOLLAND,
Via email.

Tradesmen's entrances

Sir,

Please do not call skilled wiremen, cable-installers, tradesmen and mechanics "engineers" as you have done thrice in one paragraph (Signal Failures, Eye 1201).

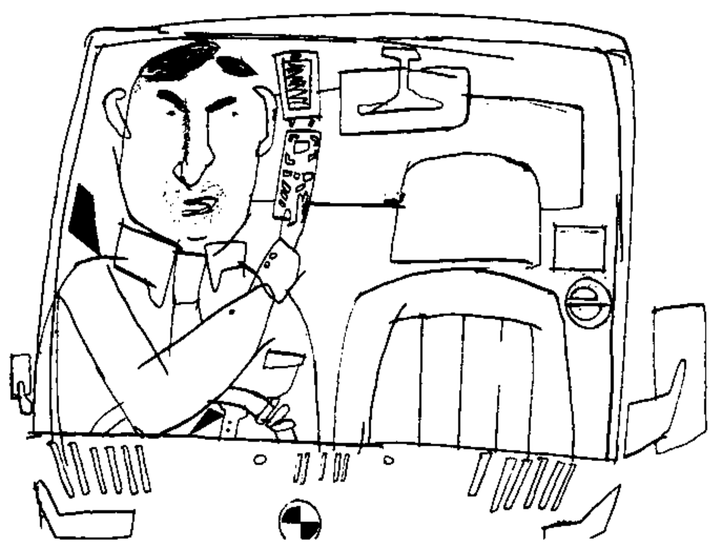
The contractors of whom you write may not have employed enough skilled tradesmen or mechanics to move the work forward at proper speed (possibly because of the high hourly rate a tradesman earns even when he is waiting), but the men you say the contractors lack are not *engineers.*

Would you report that a hospital handicapped only by a lack of skilled nurses was "short of physicians and surgeons"?

JOHN R. GIBSON,

Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Can't possibly speak now, Simon. I'm on the M6. I'll get back to you when I stop."

G whizz!

Sir,

Catching up on Eye 1199 I noticed another story where you show your complete lack of understanding of engineering.

In your eagerness to put the knife into the MoD for wasting money you state that 'it is fair to deduce that the Typhoon is able to endure fantastically severe G forces – far more severe, in fact, than can be endured by the human body'.

The Typhoon is officially rated at +9/-3g, that is it is meant to sustain in regular use g forces of between 9 positive and 3 negative. In fact in aeronautical engineering it is common to over-engineer any structure to withstand 1½ times the rated g forces, so as to allow for unexpected concentrations of force, so the airframe is probably actually capable of sustaining anything from +13.5/-4.5g, and possibly higher from good engineering practice and to add to the lifespan of the aircraft.

The human body is without aid capable of surviving +5/-2g. In a fighter aircraft like the Typhoon the pilots are trained to breathe and tense certain muscles to survive even more, and then on top of that have g-suits that compress the body to allow even greater endurance. Add to that the reclined seat fitted to further increase pilot g resistance and the pilot should be capable of sustained g forces of +9/-3g with relative ease.

So far from wasting money the aircraft has been carefully designed to sustain the design loads, which have been specified to match the physical capabilities of the pilots that will fly in it.

Regards,
JOHN THOMPSON (BEng),

London.

Forgotten history?

Sir,

Granville Bull (Eye 1202) claims that Aung San "invited the Japanese army into Burma thus causing the widespread killing of Allied troops". This is false. Forgotten Armies *by Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper gives a very clear account of the relevant history. The Japanese did not require any "invitation" into Burma as the British in Burma collapsed under their attack. During the Japanese occupation Aung San raised a Burmese Independence Army that the Japanese thought was going to help them resist the British Empire forces' reconquest of Burma. In fact this army never fought against the British. Aung San was secretly negotiating with the British for postwar Burmese independence, and at the crucial moment his army attacked the Japanese positions from the rear, which significantly reduced the British and Indian casualties in the Burma Campaign.*

Yours,
JOHN WILSON,

Via email.

"Actually I only took holy orders to get the kids into a C of E primary"

Move Over, Darling

Sir,

I wonder if we're missing the young person's perspective on the current political scene. On p. 2 of my copy of Peter Pan, *it says:*

"Mr Darling... was one of those deep ones who knew about stocks and shares. Of course no one really knows, but he quite seemed to know, and he often said stocks were up and shares were down in a way that would have made any woman respect him."

Yours,
MATTHEW WRIGHT,
London NW8.

Flash Harry

Sir,

In your piece about Brigadier Sir Harry Flashman's final deployment (What You Really Will Miss, Eye 1201) you have him musing that Scud East had "never forgiven me for leaving him in the lurch that time in the Crimea..."

But surely it was East who left Flashman in the lurch on that occasion, trapped in the snow under a sledge, as they fled from a peasant attack on Count Pencherjevsky's home. East, in his defence, could claim he had no choice as he had to urgently relay intelligence about a Russian plan to invade India through Afghanistan and he had, indeed, done his utmost to free Flashman before having to make his own escape.

Yours sincerely,
KIM SENGUPTA,
Via email.

Sir,

Not a sentimental reader and have never even thought of cancelling my subscription in protest at anything... so perhaps I was especially privileged to enjoy the Literary Review's genuinely touching parting gesture to George MacDonald Fraser – good to know that even you, Sir, recognise that quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus *(J.C. Spring,* Flashman And The Redskins *p. 24) when sending off a great man of our days.*

Yours,
TIM PRICE,
Via email.

Rhyming slanging

Sir,

In a first draft Sean O'Brien might have called his Forward and T.S. Eliot award-winning collection of poetry The Drowned World *(Books & Bookmen, 1202) but he subsequently arrived at a much better title –* The Drowned Book. *As Bookworm points out, the world of published poetry is a very small one; if we accept that the best judges of poetry are other poets then it is inevitable that this peer-review approach (as recommended in McMasters' government report on excellence in the arts no less) will err on the cosy side.*

Has Bookworm got any better ideas?

PAULINE BEAUMONT,
Via email.

Clean Digger

Sir,

Sorry, but the Dirty Digger has nothing to to do with Angus and Robertson bookshops (Books & Bookmen, Eye 1202). Currently something of a ball and chain (geddit?) for the private equity group PEP, its owners over the last ten years have included Hachette, Whitcoulls, Brash's and even the sainted Paul Hamlyn, but never a Murdoch.

Nice theory that Rupert is looking after James Packer – and I'm sure he would – but totally wrong. Just for once your normally well informed and entertaining literary pages are wildly off the mark.

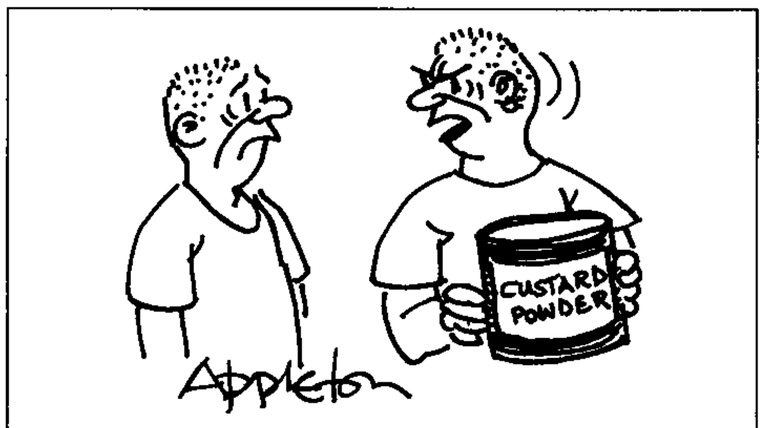
PATRICK GALLAGHER,
Chairman, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW.

Damned statistics

Sir,

RADAR (Eye 1201) reckon that the ONS calculate there to be seven million disabled people of working age in Britain. That means somewhere between one in five and one in six of us is disabled. That's way off my radar when scrutinised for reasonableness. For Ms Sayce to blithely quote absurd statistics like this one calls into question everything in her letter and everything her organisation stands for.

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW FINDLAY,
London.



"Oi! Are you looking at my Bird's?"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"And it's West Ham to start the second half attacking their supporters away to our right..."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(Jeff Goddard)

"We took our finger off the boil..."
DOMINIC CORK, Sky Sports
(Stephen Riley)

"This where he [Haydn] really started nailing his true voice to the mast."
BBC Radio 3
(J.R. Partington)

"It was as clear as night is day."
ALAN GREEN, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Davis)

"The Coen brothers are a one-man band."
National Public Radio film critic, Radio 4
(Roger Graef)

Pedants Corner

... As an English grammar student I would like to point out to Brian White (Letters, 1202) that he is actually missing the point of the existence of the apostrophe. It changes the meaning of a sentence and indicates the possessive form. "Visitors Book" (no apostrophe) is a book for visitors to sign to indicate their presence. However, "Visitors' Book" (with apostrophe) is possessive and denotes that the book is the possession of the visitors, which is unlikely.

The same rule applies to "Boys' Brigade/ Boys Brigade". They spell it with the apostrophe because they consider that the Brigade belongs to them. Two months' holiday doesn't make sense as the holiday obviously doesn't belong to the months. Two months (no apostrophe) holiday denotes the time length of the holiday.

BERNARD DESSOY.

... If Private Eye is to be consistent in its use of the superfluous apostrophe (Pedants' [sic] Corner, 1202), Media News will have to become Media's News. See the problem?

TOM CUTLER.

... If Pedants Corner stretches the full length of the page it must have four corners. Should it be Pedants' Corners, Pedant's Corners, or – to fit in with modern trends – perhaps Pedants Corner's? It is all most troubling.

JOHN CHARLES.

... Who led the Pedants' Revolt?
Which Tyler.

PHIL SAUNDERS.

... I'm thinking of bringing out a magazine called Pedants' Eye. *Circulation will be guaranteed by the huge number of readers buying it simply to assert it should properly be called* Pedant's Eye. *Or indeed "Eyes", as the vast majority of the population possess two.*

MIKE BARFIELD.

...Why don't you rename Pedant's/ Pedants/Pedants' Corner/Column the Zzzz-List?

MARY NORTH.

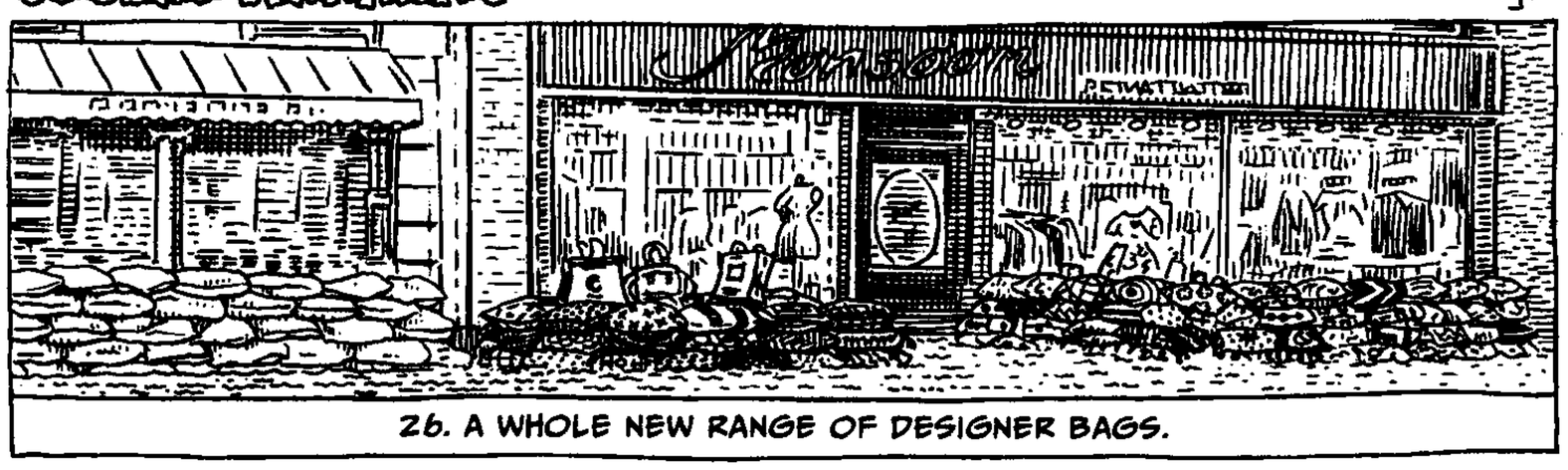
... At the risk of inducing apostrophe meltdown in your loyal pedants, I feel that the only person who can decide, once and for all, whether or not there should be an apostrophe, is the editor himself.

Does he view the column as a part of the publication which has been given over (taken over?) by the pedants, in which case the apostrophe is required, or does he view it as merely a page where he puts all the letters pedants have written so as to keep them in one place, in which case possession doesn't come into it – and neither should the apostrophe.

Mr Hislop – end this insanity now!

SIMON FINCH.

● *OK. From now on it is "Pedan'ts Corner". Ed.*



26. A WHOLE NEW RANGE OF DESIGNER BAGS.

Letter from **Tbilisi**

from Our Own Correspondent

THEY say January is the gloomiest month. Not in Georgia. Thanks to our Julian calendar, we had two new year parties as well as Orthodox Christmas last month – and quite the most entertaining elections in our brief but colourful post-Soviet history.

The reputation of our president, Mikhail "Misha" Saakashvili, had been taking a pounding. In November, the hero of the Rose Revolution of 2003, apostle of all things liberal and an alumnus of Columbia university, ordered the use of water cannon, rubber bullets, tear gas and the latest in "long-range acoustic devices" to disperse a miserable bunch of opposition supporters blocking the capital's main street. Even the state department demanded an explanation. Misha had one: it was – as always – a conspiracy.

Misha said the world's richest Georgian, London-based billionaire oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili, was plotting a coup. The silver-haired, handlebar-moustached "businessman" was using the opposition, together with a TV channel he owns with News Corporation, to try to overthrow the government. Even though Badri, like his best buddy and business partner Boris Berezovsky, is a wanted man in Moscow, Misha alleged that the whole plot had the backing of the FSB, Russia's secret service.

At the time no one bought the story. Badri had decided to stand for president, campaigning on a platform of "whatever the government pays you—I'll double it"; and many thought this was just a way for Misha to try to discredit a serious rival. Then evidence began to emerge. A secretly filmed video showed one of Badri's right-hand men talking with the head of our special operations department, our version of the Stasi but with its own website. The pair were discussing how to seize power after the election – something that would involve arresting the interior minister and, quite possibly, killing some of his guards.

The next day an audio recording was released. The spook had travelled to London to meet Badri in person; and in the recording, which was apparently made by MI5, Badri was apparently heard offering $100m to the official in order to arrest the interior minister, stir up massive street protests and other "provocations", and force Misha to flee. Such is Georgian cynicism, many of us held that the tapes were fake. But then Badri admitted he had indeed offered the $100m "for the sake of Georgia". He said he would withdraw from the presidential contest. But then he thought again: our electoral law grants candidates immunity from prosecution, even for those now wanted for treason.

The Badri scandal left Levan Gachechiladze as the main opposition front-runner. This former wine-mogul, nicknamed "Buckwheat", has a habit of threatening journalists and wearing tracksuits to meetings with ambassadors. He was the candidate of a loose coalition of opposition parties from Christian fundamentalist to neo-liberal. Though his common touch is endearing to some, he only got the nomination because he was not affiliated to any party and the squabbling members of his coalition couldn't bear to see one of their rivals get ahead.

With all his fiery rhetoric and chest pounding, "Buckwheat" got just 25 percent of the vote against Misha's 53 percent. But "Buckwheat", Badri and the rest of our ragtag opposition insist the vote was rigged by the authorities to help Misha avoid a second round. The OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and other monitors just about passed the process; but the opposition claimed heavy lobbying by Misha's American friends had paid off.

The controversy has refused to die. The central electoral commission has shown itself subservient to Misha, and some serious irregularities with the count have emerged. The opposition has thus been back on the streets. Misha has been inaugurated and parliamentary elections are only weeks away. Ain't democracy grand?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "For the past thirty years, I have been living a lie," Mayor Ken Williams confessed during a resignation speech in Centreton, Arkansas, "but I had no choice. I used to be a Baptist preacher called Don LaRose, living happily in Indiana, until I was kidnapped by a satanic

cult in 1975. They forced me into the back of a van, brainwashed me with an electric machine attached to my forehead, wiped my memory, and threatened to kill my wife and children unless I ran away. So I began a new life under a new name, after taking the identity of a man who had recently died in a car crash. I had no idea that I had done this until last month, when I had a truth serum injection and it all came back to me. I only did it to protect my family, but under the circumstances I am resigning with immediate effect."

Baptist church deacon Lee Roy Floyd later told reporters that he remembered LaRose. "The night he disappeared, he was giving a sermon when he suddenly stopped talking, and said he'd seen a Satan worshipper through a window. Then he screamed and ran outside, and neither we nor his wife Eunice ever saw him again." *(Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 22/11/07. Spotter: Mal Function)*

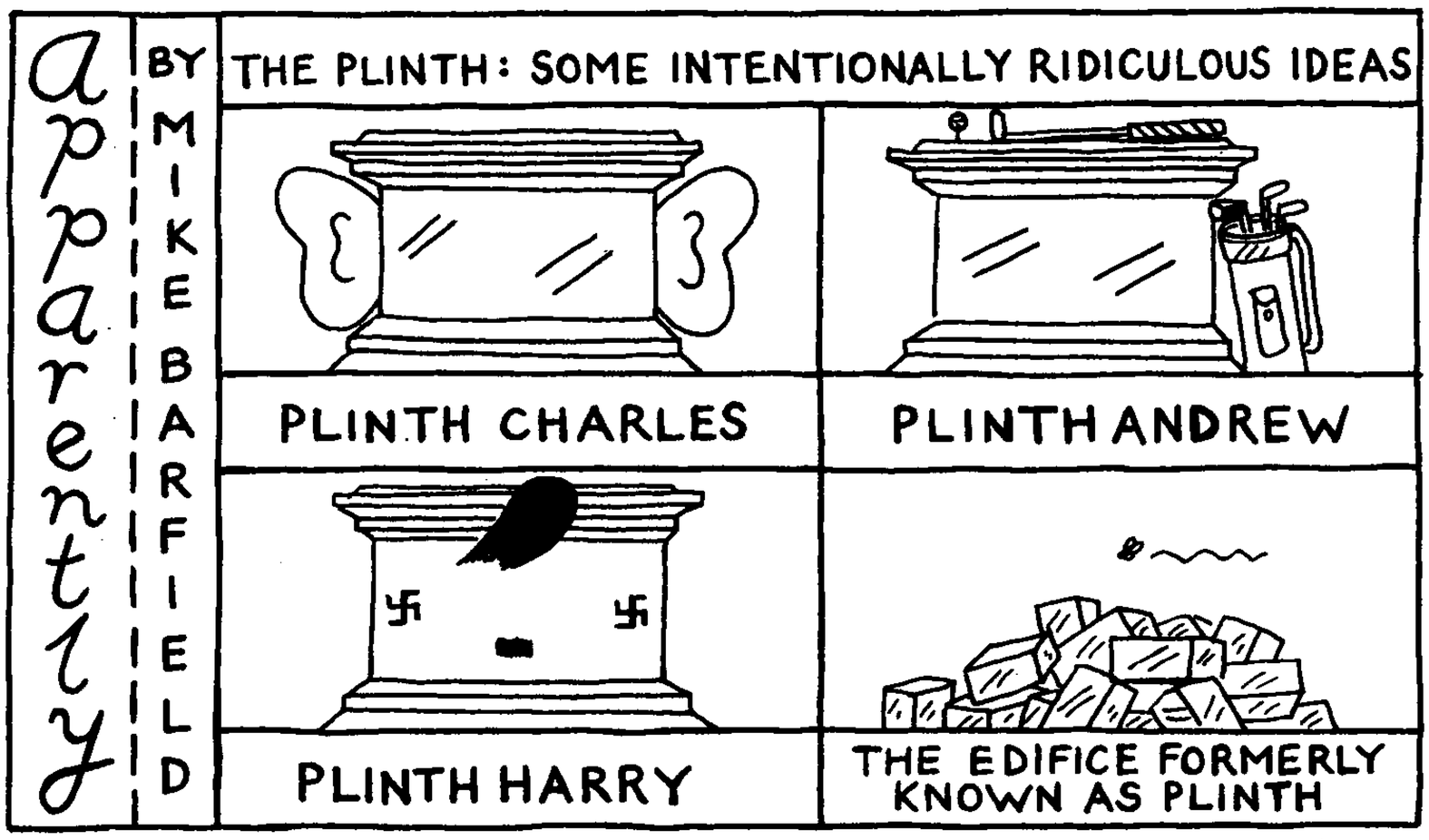
● *"Purnam Rama Sastri had been studying meditation for many years," Sub Inspector of Police Md. Osman told an inquest in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, "and recently claimed to have mastered the ancient yogic practice of Jala Stambanam. That is the art of defying the body's normal physical limits, and he hoped to become head of a new spiritual movement by performing miracles in public.*

"On Wednesday night, he invited a crowd to watch him jump from the top of a two-storey building, and despite sustaining mild concussion and a sprained ankle, he claimed to have defied gravity. Intoxicated with his success, he then invited the crowd to watch him descend into a well at midnight, assuring his family that Jala Stambanam would enable him to breathe underwater, and that he would be unharmed when they winched him up next morning. After lowering Purnam Rama Sastri into the well, they all went home, marvelling at his miraculous powers. But when they returned to the well next morning, they found that he had drowned, and his body had to be fished out by police divers. In the interests of public health, we recommend that nobody should drink unboiled water from the well for seven days." (The Hindu, 16/11/07. Spotter: Dr K Weerasuriya)

– ● –

● "We are spreading toilet culture throughout the city, by ensuring that our public toilets are never boring," Lu Xiaoqing told reporters in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing. "Here in Foreigners Street, we have the world's largest public bathroom, with more than a thousand toilets located inside a vast porcelain palace with an Egyptian facade, spread over an area of 30,000 square feet. Tourists and locals can listen to gentle music, watch television, or surf the internet while using them, and they always leave feeling very very happy.

"We have also set up a fleet of mobile public toilet buses, which roam the streets every day from 7:30am to 10pm. Each one can relieve up to a thousand people a day, and they leave very very happy. Our outdoor street urinals are also popular with locals, although few foreign men will use them, because only their lower body is covered by the screens, while their face is on full display to passers by. Our greatest success has been the installation of outdoor sinks that look like a row of naked women bending over in high heels, with the sinks embedded in their backs. It used to be very hard to persuade men to wash their hands after urinating, but now they queue up to do it, because they can fantasise about entering a woman from behind while they are washing. As I say, everyone leaves here very very happy." *(Chongqing Morning Post, 23/9/07. Spotter: Richard J. Daly)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 14

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

Once again this week the true nature of all those forces who are opposed to the Age of Change has been exposed.

I refer to the shameless and corrupt conduct of one of the leading figures in the Cameronist-Davisite faction, the archetypal Tory profiteer, capitalist, nepotist and examplar of naked snout-in-the troughism Conway.

Comrades, it is sickening to think the hard-earned wages of decent, hard-working British folk were diverted into the coffers of this crooked running-dog of traditional Conservative sleaze-ism and his effete and degenerate public-schoolist Old Harrovian offspring!

Yet again, this disgusting catalogue of grand larceny shows us how ill-fitted is this claque of opportunist hyenas to get their hands on the reins of power and the wealth of the nation.

And yet it is with the greatest regret that I must concede that Conway's crimes are only small beer when set alongside the monumental acts of theft lately committed by the discredited former leader, ex-Comrade Blair.

All of you will have been filled with shame and revulsion by the spectacle of this despicable vulture rushing to gorge himself on the rotten entrails of Wall Street, neo-imperialist J.P. Morgan-ism.

Such a stomach-churning display of avaricious adventurism, unparalleled in human history, only goes to show that the hyena Blair, under the pretence of being a friend to the working masses, was all along a crypto-Conwayist renegade Tory, as many of us said all along.

I must mention too at this point the money-grubbing antics of Madame Blair, whose shameless trading on her husband's position has now led her to sell herself as a so-called "Motivational Speaker" at gatherings of American industrialist capitalist running dogs. The failings of sleazite Conway family-ism must pale into insignificance when set beside the unprecedented wealth worship of the ex-Comrades Blair.

This is why I am decreeing that Britain should have a new Day of Remembrance every year to commemorate all those who battled to overthrow the European dictator Blair, whose tyranny for ten years cast such an oppressive shadow over half the globe.

These heroic forces were of course led by myself, although I am too modest to seek personal glory by drawing your attention to my key part in this historic victory.

My proposed new festival in our national calendar will be known as Merchant Bank Holiday Monday, when the toiling masses will be free to celebrate their deliverance from the evils of Blairism. They will be advised to do this by going out to spend what remains of their income on British goods made by our comrades in the People's Republic of China, and sold to them by our Polish comrades in the retail and hospitality sectors of our thriving British economy.

Yours supremely,

Gordon Brown

NEW BRITISH COINAGE
Decree No. 94

The figure of Britannia on the 50p coin is a reactionary, feudal relic of Jerusalemite-Land-of-Hope-And-Gloryist-Last-Night-of-the-Proms-ism. With her warmongering, spear, shield and handbag, she reminds us of the tyrannical virago Madame Thatcher and her belligerent acolyte Blair.

She will be, therefore, hurled into the dustbin of history and replaced by the much more appropriate symbol of Prudencia.

As all young Comrades will learn in their new Diploma of Britishness Level 2 (administered by Comrade Ronald McDonald), this Roman deity embodies the qualities of thrift, caution and financial rectitude.

She was worshipped particularly in the province of Caledonia, whose people became legendary for their shrewd management of their local economy.

With this new coin in their pockets, the British people will once again feel complete confidence in the "Age of Change in Your Pocket!" (this amusing play on words was supplied by the Jocularity Delivery Unit, as further demonstration of the Supreme Leader's gift for impromptu banter, and is registered as No. 7413 and filed under "Comical Coinage Quips").

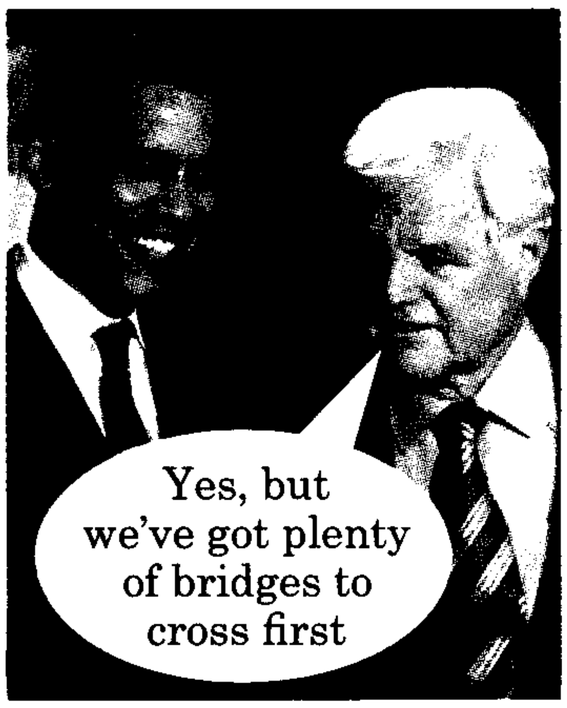
Enemy of the People: Charles Clarke

This gross, semi-bearded pie-eater was consigned to the dustbin of history long ago but now, like some half-poisoned rat, he emerges to insult the Supreme Leader. His pathetic attempt to undermine the achievements of the Age of Change by suggesting "things aren't going very well at the moment" do not even merit a response. Comrades are advised that my four-hour denunciation of Comrade Big Ears can be read on the official website www.fattybash.uk.com.rade

THE SUPREME LEADER HAS DECLARED THAT THE FOLLOWING MEASURES WILL BE IMPLEMENTED THIS WEEK

1. The construction of a new Super Prison, to be known as The Titanic, holding 2 million prisoners, to cope with the dramatic fall in crime.
2. The reintroduction of stop-and-search powers for the police, to cope with the dramatic fall in crime *(see above)*.
3. The compulsory teaching of New Easy Maths in Britain's schools, to assist the government in recruiting statisticians capable of compiling figures showing an even further drop in crime in the future *(see above)*.

KENNEDY BACKS OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT



"Boy, you must really hate Hillary Clinton"

ADVERTISEMENT

SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY IN AFGHANISTAN

Joining the modern army isn't just about killing people – oh no. In today's army you make sure that democratic leaders like President Khazi of Afghanistan have the right to kill people themselves for going on the internet and downloading stuff about women's rights.

You see? Freedom of Information, a Free Press, Women's Emancipation. You can help fight all of it!

Join the army and see the world return to the Middle Ages.

GNOMEWORTH

Product Recall

FOLLOWING complaints, Gnomeworths is withdrawing its "Paedo" range of children's underwear. When the range was launched we were unaware of the connotations of the word "Paedo". Only when our staff looked up the word on Wikipaedophile did it emerge that "Paedo" was perhaps an unsuitable brand name for this type of merchandise. It has now been renamed "The Glitter Collection" to avoid giving further offence to our customers.

GNOMEWORTH 2008

THAT NEW HOME OFFICE PHRASEBOOK
What You Will Read

by **Polly Tickly-Correct**

THE Home Office has issued a new phrasebook to be used by police and civil servants, which it hopes will persuade the Muslim community that it is not being targeted over acts of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.

In fact, the phrase *"acts of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism"* will be replaced by the words *"unpleasant incidents caused by nasty people"*.

Other phrases to be banned include *"Suicide bombers"* which becomes *"unfortunate cases of Extreme Self Harm"*, *"Jihad"* which becomes *"Need for greater understanding of different faiths"* and *"7/7"*, which becomes *"25/12"* or *"Christmas"*.

● Full story plus pix **94**

THE NEW DWORKIN BEE

Friday 8 February, 2008

LONDON MAYORAL PRIMARIES
Crowds go wild for Borik Obarmy

by Our UK correspondent **Hiram J Pipesucker II**

LARGE NUMBERS of enthusiastic Londoners are responding to the charisma of a new phenomenon that is sweeping London's political scene like a tornado.

Borik Obarmy looks set to become the first Turkish mayor of the city of London in a historic election victory later this year.

His supporters say that Borik is like a breath of fresh air with his youthful good looks and his appeal to women everywhere.

Maybe Borik *is* short on specific policies but he is long on charm.

Alas Poor Borik

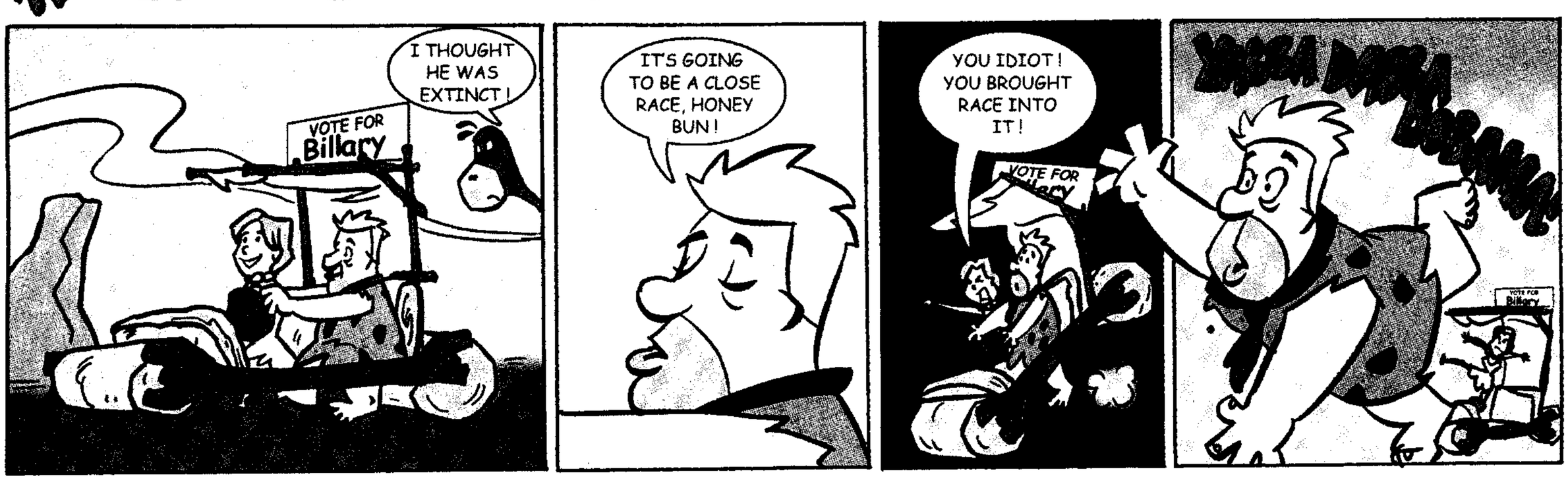
Said veteran UK commentator Lord Rees Mogg, "He reminds me of the young Charles Kennedy before he was assassinated by Ming Campbell."

One thing is for sure: Borik stands for change and change is the one thing Londoners crave.

ON OTHER PAGES

● **"I witness the Borik Magic"** by Andrew Gimson p2
● **"Will Borik get the black vote?"** Leader p3
● **Borik's wife: is she his secret weapon?** p94

MEET THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY


I THOUGHT HE WAS EXTINCT!
VOTE FOR Billary
IT'S GOING TO BE A CLOSE RACE, HONEY BUN!
YOU IDIOT! YOU BROUGHT RACE INTO IT!
VOTE FOR Billary

The 2008 Hugh Cudlipp Memorial Lecture In Full

The Role of the Media In Contemporary Britain

by Alastair Campbell

Good evening, scumbags. I'll tell you what's wrong with the media nowadays. They're so pathetic that they believed all those lies I told them. Ha, ha, ha. Can I have my fucking cheque, please? © *A. Campbell*

"It's the new craze – golf!"

Highlights

Film

Sweeney – The Demon Boozer of Fleet Street
(18)

NO DRINK was safe as the demon boozer attacks innocent Scientologists and turns them into Panorama *(surely 'mincemeat', Ed.)*. Johnny Depp (played by John Sweeney) will terrify the life out of any viewer as he loses control and lashes out with his razor sharp corkscrew *(surely 'wit', Ed.)*.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Miles Kington

So. Farewell
Then
Miles Kington.

Humorist,
Jazz musician and
Inventor of
"Let's Parlez Franglais".

Comme vous
Might have
Ecrit,
Alors,
Adieu donc
Miles Kington.

E.J. Thribb
(Dix-sept and a half)

Sweeny Toad (18) 2hrs30 (NFT)
Sat /Sun /Thurs: (10:15am Sat/Sun Only) 13:05, 15:45, 18:40, 21:30

Advertisement, Watford Observer

GLENDELLA SLAGGSON

FLEET STREET'S JUICIEST DISH!!!

■ **THREE CHEERS and an Oscar to Julie Christie – she's the ageless actress who puts the sex into sexagenarian!?! She still looks like a teenager and ain't it just grand to find a Hollywood superstar who isn't afraid to shun the limelight and keep her private life to herself!?! Don't Look Now or you'll miss this evergreen beauty!?!! Geddit!?**

■ JULIE CHRISTIE – aren'tcha-sickofher giving hundreds of interviews saying she doesn't give any interviews!?! Open any newspaper and there's Geriatric Julie a-wrinklin' and a-twinklin' and a-sayin' she wants to be left alone!?! Take a tip from Auntie Glenda – if you want to stay out of the limelight don't become a Hollywood actress!?! Don't Look Now – it's her again!?!! Geddit?!

■ **CHEFS' HATS off to Nigella!?! She's not going to leave her little 'uns a bean – and I don't mean the haricot variety, Mister Stoopid!?! Good on yer, Nigella!?!! Let the kiddies fend for themselves and go out and earn a crust on their own!?! That'll give them some moral fibre – and that's not the sort of fibre you don't find in Nigella's recipes which make you as lardy as her!?! So, come off it, Nigella, TV's Scrooge of the Scullery – hand over some of your dough to your starving kiddies instead of scoffing it all!?! It's a tough world out there and they need all the help they can get!?!! Shame on you, Fatso!!?!**

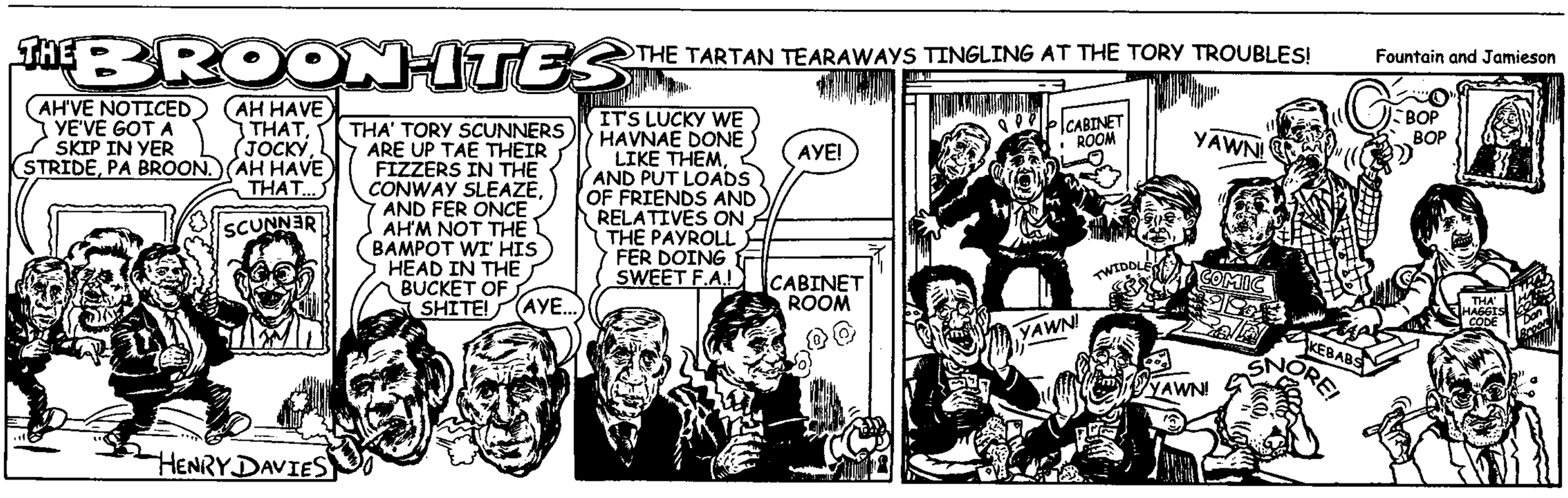
■ *HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Lusty Lenten Lovers!*

● **Fabio Capello** – pick me to score!?! Geddit?!?!

● **Daniel Barenboim** – you know the score?!? I'll turn over for you!?

● **Sadiq Khan MP** – there're no bugs in my bed, Big Boy!?! So how about it?!??

Byeeee!!!


THE BROON-ITES
THE TARTAN TEARAWAYS TINGLING AT THE TORY TROUBLES!
Fountain and Jamieson
AH'VE NOTICED YE'VE GOT A SKIP IN YER STRIDE, PA BROON.
AH HAVE THAT, JOCKY, AH HAVE THAT...
SCUNNER
HENRY DAVIES
THA' TORY SCUNNERS ARE UP TAE THEIR FIZZERS IN THE CONWAY SLEAZE, AND FER ONCE AH'M NOT THE BAMPOT WI' HIS HEAD IN THE BUCKET OF SHITE!
AYE...
IT'S LUCKY WE HAVNAE DONE LIKE THEM, AND PUT LOADS OF FRIENDS AND RELATIVES ON THE PAYROLL FER DOING SWEET F.A.!
AYE!
CABINET ROOM
CABINET ROOM
YAWN!
BOP BOP
TWIDDLE
COMIC
THA' HAGGIS CODE
KEBABS
YAWN!
YAWN!
SNORE!

Exclusive to the Daily Mail

The True Story Of Why Blair Backed Bush - Was It Cash For War?

asks award-winning columnist STEPHEN GLOVE

FOR FIVE years it has been the greatest mystery of British politics – why did Tony Blair give such unequivocal support to President Bush's mad and ill-fated invasion of Iraq?

Among the many possible explanations for this extraordinary decision is the improbable suggestion that the prime minister only backed Bush in the hope of cashing in on lucrative American deals on his eventual retirement.

Let me be clear. Not for a moment am I accusing Mr Blair of being so greedy for money and so devoid of conscience that he would be prepared to risk the lives of thousands of British servicemen in exchange for millions of dollars paid by US publishers, bankers, insurance companies and lecture circuits.

Yet, when you observe Mr Blair's behaviour since leaving office, as he desperately attempts to pay off the vast mortgages on his various reckless property deals, one cannot help but see the former prime minister in a new light.

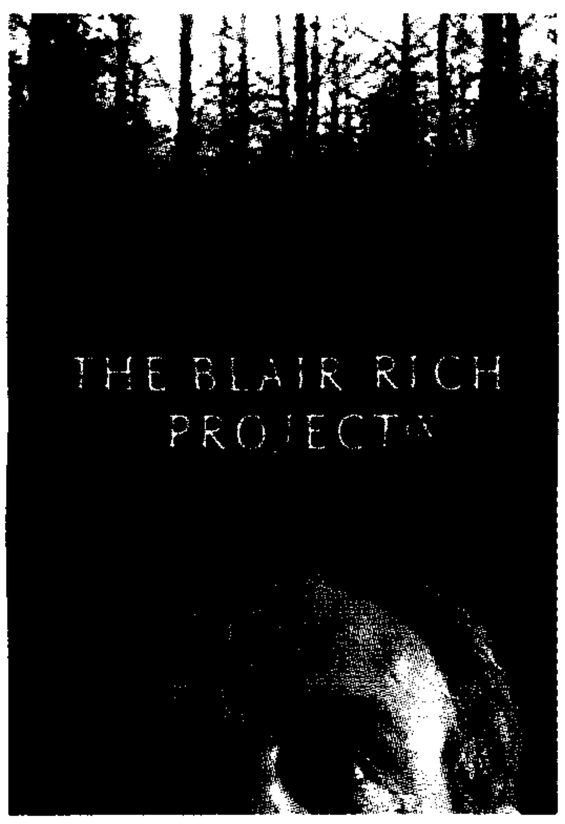
Let me say again, for the benefit of the lawyer who is sitting beside me as I type these words, that I am not for a minute claiming that Mr Blair only supported President Bush in order to fill his boots with blood money.

Such a wild allegation would be outrageous, even if it were true, which it is not.

All the same, the facts speak for themselves. What seems to be now emerging is *(Cont. p. 94)*

● *TOMORROW: Did Tony only sign the EU Treaty as part of a secret deal with Sarkozy and Merkel to make him EU President?* (No. Mail lawyer.)

FILM CHOICE



SHOCKING horror film as madman goes on the rampage trying to get hold of all the money in the world. Soon innocent bankers, insurers and publishers lose their minds and give it to him.

Eye Rating: **Terrifying**

CRIME SHOCK Survey Of Male Teenagers – Results In Full

- 99% have been "involved in crime"
- 100% "not there when it happened"
- 110% "good in knife fights"
- 120% "not virgins"
- 0% "gay"

IN THE COURTS

'I'm No Bugger,' Says Fugger

Day 94: *Inquest into the death of Diana, the Late Princess of Wales (Fugger v. The Truth)*

THE INQUEST resumed today before Mr Justice Scott-Carrot, when the sister of the deceased, Lady Sabrina McCorkscrew, told the court of her last conversations with her sister.

Philip Chequetrouser QC *(on behalf of the Metropolitan Police, Tesco supermarkets and the Council for the Protection of Rural England)*: Lady Sabrina, would you kindly tell the court what the late St Diana said when she rang you from the jacuzzi deck on board Mr Fayed's yacht, the Flying Fugger, on the night of August 28th 1997?

Lady Sabrina: Yah. She said, "You'd better be careful what you say, Sabby, because you-know-who has bugged the phone."

Sir Michael Hugefee QC *(for the plaintiff Mr Al-Fugger)*: Is this not clearly a reference to the Duke of Edinburgh, acting in collaboration with MI6, whose agents are supremely well-versed in the dark arts of surveillance and secret espionage?

Fayed: Too fuggin' right! You tell him like it is, Hugefee. That's what I'm fuggin' paying you for.

Lady Sabrina: Are you thick or what? I'm talking about you, Mr Fayed. She thought you were listening in to everything she said.

Fayed: Are you calling me a fuggin' bugger? I tell you, Mohammed is no shirtlifter. Not like the fuggin' Duke of Edinburgh, with his pooftah kilt.

Scottlecarrot: Mr Fayed, you appear to be the victim of a linguistic misunderstanding, perhaps due to your foreign origins. The word "bugger" can refer to two distinct types of activity, only one of which is still illegal, more's the pity you may think, though that is a matter for you. On the one hand, it may refer to two consenting adults in the privacy of a public convenience of their choice. On the other, it may describe the privy fixing of an unobtrusive electronic device, to enable a third party to overhear the conversations, on the telephone or otherwise, of those parties whose intercourse has thus been illicitly trespassed upon.

Chequetrouser: Your Lordship has put the matter very succinctly, if I may say so.

Scott-Carrot: I am indebted to you.

Lady Sabrina: Can someone tell me what's going on here? I've got a very important hairdressing appointment with Jean-Claude at 3.30 and I really can't afford to miss it.

Scott-Carrot: I quite understand your predicament, Lady McCorkscrew, and I must apologise for wasting your time, but I am sure you will understand that we must spin things out for as long as we can here, so that the entire legal profession can continue in gainful employment for many years to come.

(The case continues...)

"When the sand runs out, we'd like you to leave"

UK's BIGGEST HEIST – LATEST

by Our Crime Staff **Rob Banks**

THE largest bank raid ever perpetrated in British criminal history was organised and executed by a gang of bankers who stopped at nothing to get their hands on record amounts of public money.

The gang, captured on CCTV footage, gained entry to Number 10 Downing Street helping themselves to billions of pounds of taxpayers' money.

They were helped by a shadowy insider known only as Gordon Brown and his assistant, who they called 'Darling', and a man they referred to as 'The Guvnor' (of the Bank of England). The gang cunningly disguised themselves as competent financiers before holding the country to ransom and demanding that the entire population prop up Northern Rock or else.

Full story and pics. p 94.

NHS – END TO MIXED WARDS 'NOT ACHIEVABLE'

by Our Medical Staff **TV's Dr Phil Corridors** *(surely Hammond, Ed?)*

A SPOKESMAN for the National Health Service admitted yesterday that so-called 'Mixed Bug Wards' were here to stay.

He told reporters, "I know I promised that we would have 'Single Bug Wards' by 2008 but this has not been possible. Realistically we have to concede that wards will contain both MRSA and C. difficile."

"I know there is an argument for keeping them separate and I know that people think it is improper for bugs to exist in the same ward but I am afraid with our current hospital expenditure there is nothing we can do."

Speaking from a hospital he added, "I am now washing my hands of this problem.

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-5.30pm Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

8 February 2008

0900 hrs All officers assigned to form-filling duties.

1100 hrs Officers continue with form-filling duties.

1300 hrs Break for lunch, all officers fill in 94-page 'Lunch Evaluation Assessment Form'.

1500 hrs Form-filling duties continue.

1700 hrs Duty Officer checks station ansaphone. Member of public reports Romanian child trafficking gang openly conducting prostitute slave auction in Tesco car park opposite police station. No officers are available to respond, due to higher-priority initiatives, ie form-filling.

1715 hrs Further form-filling duties including 940-page Assessment of Daily Form-Filling Target Attainment Form.

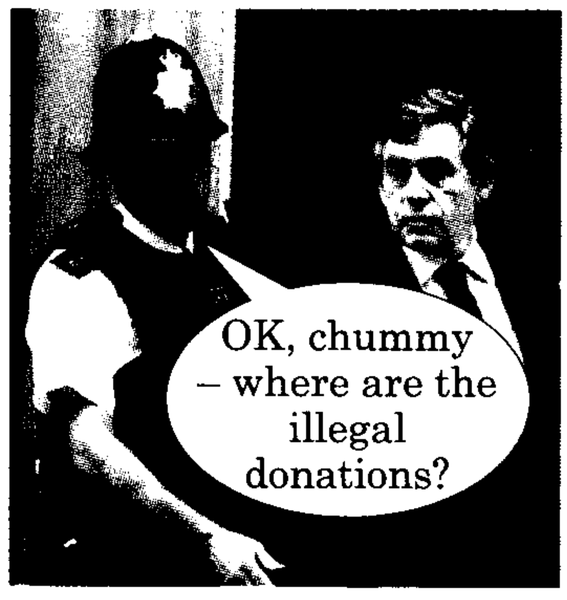
1730 hrs Station to close. Ansaphone recommends public seek advice and help on criminal or judicial matters from Neasden Sharia Court, 712 Poundstretcher Road.

SHELL HAIL NEW DISCOVERY

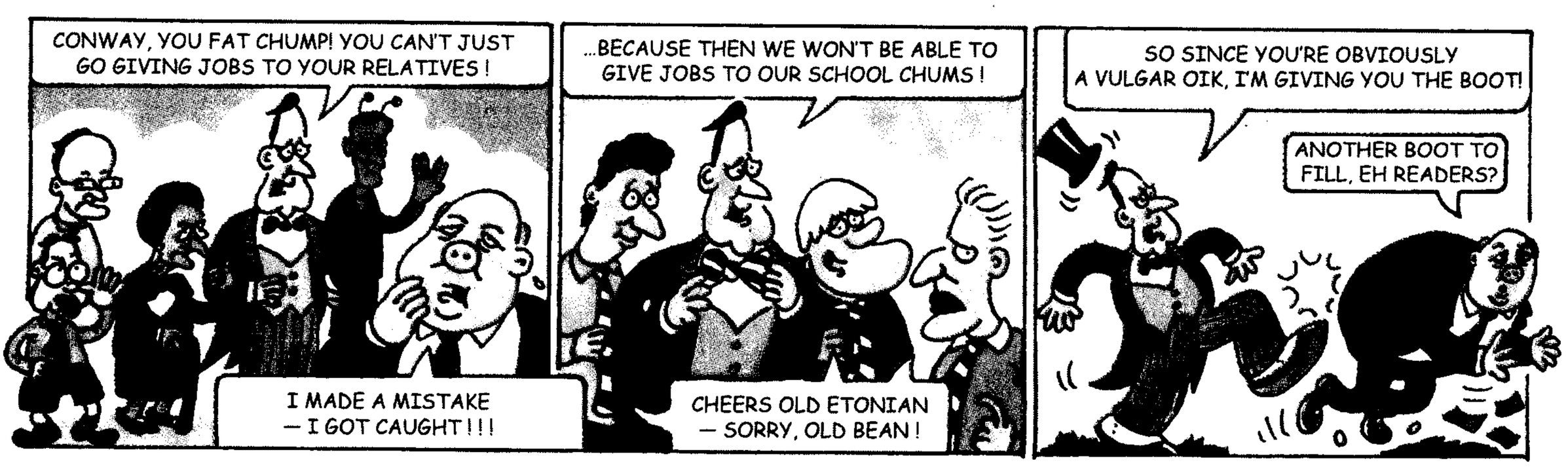
THE oil company, Shell, today announced that they have found an enormous reservoir of cash.

Said a spokesman, "Our scientists discovered it in our bank account. There is £13bn worth of money just sitting there waiting to be extracted. It's incredibly exciting. This amazing find will keep us going for the next 100 days until we put the price of petrol up again". *(Rotters)*

STOP AND SEARCH



Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


CONWAY, YOU FAT CHUMP! YOU CAN'T JUST GO GIVING JOBS TO YOUR RELATIVES!
I MADE A MISTAKE – I GOT CAUGHT!!!
...BECAUSE THEN WE WON'T BE ABLE TO GIVE JOBS TO OUR SCHOOL CHUMS!
CHEERS OLD ETONIAN – SORRY, OLD BEAN!
SO SINCE YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY A VULGAR OIK, I'M GIVING YOU THE BOOT!
ANOTHER BOOT TO FILL, EH READERS?

The Book of Ehud

Chapter 94: The Great Exodus

1. And lo, the Arabites were sore oppressed in the land of Gaza.
2. For Ehud had said unto them, "Verily, I say unto you that ye are lower than the cockatrice, even than the snails of the desert that crawleth upon their bellies.
3. "I shall visit upon you such tribulations as ye shall wish that ye had never been born.
4. "Or, rather, that ye had never launched those missiles into the Land of Israel."
5. And so it came to pass that, on the word of Ehud, the wells of Gaza ran dry, the lights were extinguished and famine stalked the land.
6. And so sore was the bondage of the Hamasites, the Arafites and all the other Arabites that the only sound that could be heard in all the land of Gaza was that of wailing and gnashing of teeth.
7. But then the Hamasites rose up and said, "We have seen a great vision.
8. "There is a Promised Land not far away, a land flowing with milk and honey, not to mention many other desirable comestibles.
9. "Let us arise and go now from this land of bondage, into the land of Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs, that we may feast upon the milk and honey that we have been promised."
10. Then they girded their loins and went unto the great wall which divideth the children of Gaza from the land of Egypt, and the trumpets sounded.
11. But the trumpets were not needed on this occasion, for the wall cometh down much more efficiently with the glycerine that is called nitro.
12. And, lo, the sky filled with flames and there was a mighty rushing wind and the wall tumbleth down, yea, like unto the walls of Jericho.
13. And there went up from the assembled multitudes a great cry of rejoicing, as they swept through the breach in the walls and descended into the land of Egypt like unto a plague of locusts.
14. And certain wise merchants of Egypt, foreseeing that this might come to pass, had raised a mighty market, 600 cubits in breadth, 800 cubits in length, 50 cubits high, with enough parking spaces for two thousand camels and donkeys.
15. And the Hamasites loaded up their beasts and their wives with all the riches of Egypt, even the following items:
16. Tins of grapefruit segments, wall-to-wall carpeting, Calor gas cylinders, DAB radios, Jaffa Cakes, bottled water, kitchen rolls, low-energy lightbulbs, Fairtrade coffee, Eat-Me organic dates, patio heaters, shaving foam, Russian rockets.
17. And so it continueth, day and night, and there seemeth no end to it.
18. And Ehud looked upon the great exodus of the Children of Gaza and saw that it was good.
20. And he sayeth to his follower, "Lo we have got rid of half the Hamasites and the Arafites and the Arabites and we didn't even have to do any smiting."

(To be continued)

WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

How They Are Related

Old Nick
|
St Nikolas
|
Czar Nicholas the Randy
|
The Dame of Sarkozy
|
Nicholas Soamesy
|
Sarko Marx
|
Sarki (H.H. Munro)
|
Sarkozy Fan Tutti
|
Nicholas Teacozy

Brunihilda
|
Isambard Kingdom Bruni
|
Mickey Brooni
|
Wayne Bruni
|
Bruni The Bare
|
Karl Marx
|
Carl Orff
|
Carla Kitorff
|
Carla Nudi

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam General Suharto, Indonesian Politician

So. Farewell
Then Suharto.

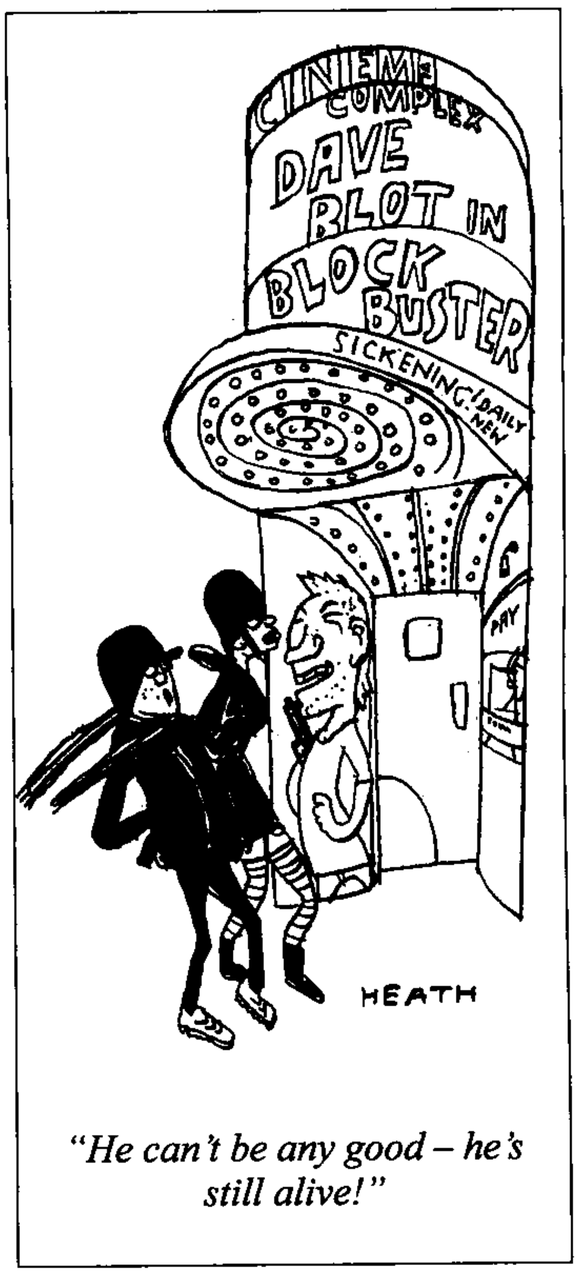
You were
President of
Indonesia.

I wondered what your
First name was
So that I could
Put it in
This poem.

But it turns out that
You never had one.

This is most
Unusual.

Thribb (17½)



"He can't be any good – he's still alive!"

Mr Ken Livingstone
An Apology

IN LAST week's issue a story headlined "Panto To Close" suggested that there was a long-running pantomime called *Drink Whittington*, starring the Mayor of London, a Mr Drink Whittington, and his newt, which was about to end its long run.

This was an unfortunate typographical error. The item should have read "Panto to close – the unpopular London pantomime, *Nick Whittington*, is to end its long run."

It should have then continued: "The fun starts when the unlovable Nick Whittington and his black crony *(surely "cat"? Ed)* Puss-In-Fill-Your-Boots, find that London's streets are paved with gold which they can put in each other's pockets."

NEXT WEEK: Another apology.

Advertisement

♥♥♥♥♥♥ *Young Lovers!* ♥♥♥♥♥♥

Celebrate Valentine's Day the Ashley Cole way

'Say It With Vomit!'

Why not give a special message to the lady you love with a unique oral tribute?

This February 14th leave your wife at home, head for the nearest nightclub, drink yourself senseless and then share your lunch with a blonde bimbo you've only just met.

It's the ultimate romantic gesture – a fragrant bouquet of carrots, tomatoes, etc.

She'll remember you for ever (because she'll sell the story to the papers).

And even if you don't remember it, you will when your wife takes you to the cleaners along with your trousers!

THAT CONWAY CHRISTMAS CARD II

TWO BOYS RELATED TO NATIONAL PUBLIC FIGURE PAID BY THE TAXPAYER TO DO NOTHNG WHO SPEND ALL THEIR TIME IN NIGHT CLUBS

New Words

Administrative shortcomings *(n. compound)* theft, particularly from public funds. Example: "Mr Derek Conway has repeatedly committed acts of administrative shortcomings by giving huge sums of taxpayers' money to members of his family" (Hansard, 2008).

Research assistant *(n.)* personal relative who receives large sums of public money in return for doing nothing. Example: "Another bottle of Dom Perignon for Mr Conway's research assistant" (overheard in University bar, 2007), or "I was at school with both of Mr Conway's research assistants" (F. Wheen, Old Harrovian Newsletter, 2008).

Secretary *(n.)* wife. Example: "Who was that secretary I saw you with last night?" "That was no secretary, that was my wife." (Old Parliamentary Jokes No. 94)

Conway *(n.)* slang variant for conman, fraudster, one who embezzles public funds.

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WILLIAMS

MUNICH, OBVIOUSLY TERRIBLE MEMORIES...
SIR ALEX
SHOULD IT BE REMEMBERED BY A MINUTES SILENCE OR APPLAUSE?
WELL THE CURRENT TEAM WATCHED A SPECIALLY PRODUCED DVD OF THE TRAGEDY AND THE FEELING WAS UNANIMOUS...
PLAYERS WERE LIMITED TO THE MAXIMUM WAGE...
THEY COULD NOT MOVE WITHOUT THE CLUBS PERMISSION...
NO ONE EVER GOT ACCUSED OF RAPE AFTER A CLUB PARTY...
1958
STUNNED SILENCE
EVRA
NANI
VIDIC
EVANS

Congratulations!

You are now supporting the work of the Bristish Dyslexia Association. Thank you for becoming a member.

BDA Website

DIARY

PROF. GEORGE STEINER: MY UNBITTEN ROOKS

What – a brief but substantial yet heretofore profoundly democratic interrogative that requests a statement or position-document likely to represent a particular choice from a number of possibilities – is it like to bite a rook? This is a question of acute signifance, its acutation significified by its very questionability.

Over the course of a life both long and celebrated, I have bitten many rooks, yet there are as many rooks that I have been obliged, with many regretations, to leave unbitten.

Even when steeped in the same collective ethos and ethnic, economic-social environment, each and every human being, ranging from the moronic and scarcely articulate to the verbally endowed, must surely have – surely have must – thought of, meditated upon, or otherwise contemplated, either individually or in a group, or groups, the biting of a rook.

Or rooks: the singularity of the rook need not be outmatched by its collectivity, nor does its occasional one-ness necessarily presage pleasure, solitary or unsolitary. As the poem of the nursery – a nursery to which both Dante, Proust and Aeschylus would have readily gained admission, had they known upon which door to knock – has it: one for sorrow, two for joy, three for a girl, four for a male.

Axiomatically, a bird in the hand commands a value equivalent or corresponding to two in the shrub, or, anagrammatically, the brush, though this avian-centric evaluation must remain approximate and is inevitably subject to cultural and neo-geopolitical differences, some unpreviously foreseen and others previously unforeseen.

But where best to bite a rook? Born in Paris, brought up trilingually, my university years took, or transported, me to the University of Chicago, or Chicago University, thence or thereafter I have been welcomed in Harvard, Cambridge, Geneva, Oxford, the Sorbonne, Bologna, Siena and the French Academy in Rome, or Roma. Repeatedly – that is to say, repeatedly -I have found myself ambulating, like Dante, through the zoological gardens of these myriad urbanities in search of an as yet unbitten rook.

The creatures in the zoo stare back at one with an envy apparently undiminished neither by their paltry captive status nor by their transparent educative unattainments. I glimpse a giraffe, and, the giraffe having been glimpsed, I reflect, not without customary characteristic generosity, that its neck is, for all its lofty reputation, immeasurably shorter than my own. Concomitantly, were I to remove my shirt and tie, my own neck – mercifully unblemished by those severe dark blotches so unbecoming to the skin of the giraffe – would measure a good many inches longer than that of the animal in question. Furthermore, is there a giraffe in the world that can justly claim to have read the complete works of the Elizabethan dramatist William Shakespeare in eight different languages, one of them Icelandic – or to have been offered the Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetics at Harvard? There is, for all its very vaunted verterbraeical reputation, no competition. Yet I have never in my not untravelled life bitten a giraffe. No giraffe has ever yelped at the sudden onset of my tooths, or teeth.

Where was I? That is a question that has already been posed by Schrodinger and Julian of Norwich, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (a country in which I have incidentally been offered no fewer than eight Professorships in as many years if not more), T.S. Eliot, Pascal and both Russells, Bertrand and Jane. Where was I? I was where I was. Was I where I was? Was I? I was. My rooks remain unbitten, as, concomitantly, do my giraffes – but what of the owls?

Throughout the known and – deservedly, to my mind – unknown world, the owl silently rejoices in his reputation for wisdom, unaccountable though that reputation may be to his peers. My entire life has been, and will doubtless continue to be, and, later, to have been, overshadowed by the unearnedness of this reputation. Theologians, philosophers and scientists have made me welcome in Copenhagen, but they have eschewed the central question. So let the question be submitted: if the owl is so very wise, why does he only eat uncooked mice, which he is, furthermore, forced to catch for himself, disgorging the remains of their prey, indigestible and undigested, in unattractive pellets or castings? Why have I refused to add my signature to manifestos, appeals, protests with many of whose propositions and urgencies I would otherwise concur but whose deification of the owl strikes me as unworthy and for-uncalled? No owl has ever held down a post in a university of any international reputation, nor has an owl ever been known to have presented first-rate research from primary sources on a subject of even secondary importance. In essence, the etymological accord of 'owl' and 'howl" is factitious; nevertheless, upon passing that smug bird in an aviary, I invariably find myself submitting a silent yet, for all that, hideously anguished howl.

The assorted and disassorted acolytes and sycophants of the owl – those who would attempt to foster, to encourage, to let flourish, its reputation for wisdom – like to argue that it is able to turn its head 360 degrees! That is nothing! Nothing is that! As Extraordinary Fellow of Churchill College at Cambridge University, I am more than able to turn my head 361 degrees, yet I continue to be denied my place, both rightful and appropriate, in the history of wildlife. Why should this be? Certain contrarieties suggest a conspiracy of owl-based birdlife, inviolate in its silence when the request for voices to be raised in my supportosition is broadcast.

My Unbitten Rooks: the rook remains unbitten, not least by myself. So the nuances of temporality and motion are more consonant with the physicas of relativity and undecidability. Cultural foundations the world yearn for me to bite them, but there are other rooks to bite, others bikes to be ridden. And when the pie was opened, the birds began to sing – and wasn't that a fastidious flat-bottomed container to set before the male sovereign pre-eminent in his specified socio-historic class?

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

GARY NOW REALISES THAT HE FACES SIGNIFICANT SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES...
HE HAS COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT HE REQUIRES SPECIALIST TREATMENT TO CONTINUE HIS ONGOING RECOVERY FROM DRUG ADDICTION...
...AND HE REQUIRES THIS SPECIALIST TREATMENT AS A MATTER OF URGENCY...
I UNDERSTAND...
SO HOW MANY GRAMS OF BOLIVIAN DOES HE WANT COURIERED OVER?
THE USUAL SHOULD BE FINE...
WELL?!! WHEN?!!

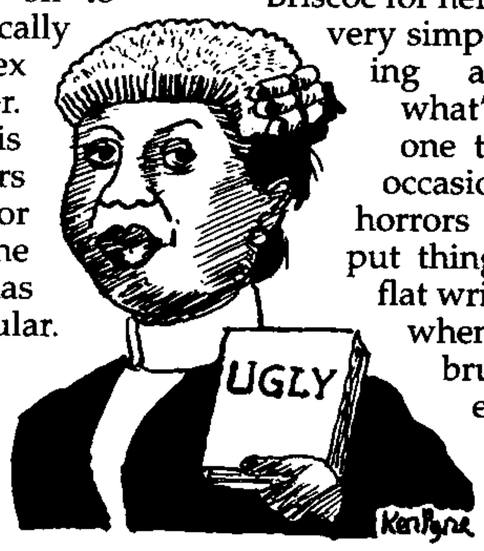
Literary Review

Painful reading

Beyond Ugly
Constance Briscoe
(Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99)

O WOE is me! In fact, o woe is almost everyone these days, as yet more misery memoirs roll off the presses. There seems to be little point putting finger to keyboard these days unless you were beaten to within an inch of your life as a child – if not gang-raped, multiply pockmarked with burning cigarettes and packed off to boarding school specifically to be utilised as a sex slave by the gym master.

Who is reading this stuff? Vast numbers of us, it turns out; for vicarious pleasure in the sufferings of others has never been more popular. Torquemada and the Marquis de Sade would probably feel their time had come.



The problems start when you have used up all your best stories in the first book. Constance Briscoe is a successful barrister and a part-time judge. She's black, she's British and her mother and stepfather treated her monstrously when she was little. She took her revenge in *Ugly*, which sold half a million copies and lodged in the bestseller lists for months. "Utterly extraordinary," said the *Daily Mail*, the misery paper that loves misery memoirs.

A couple of years later comes *Beyond Ugly*, for where else is there to go? As with the gore quotient in TV detective shows – which this genre strangely resembles – the ante is constantly being upped. Readers want more, they want worse, and if they don't get it, they will toss the book aside in disgust. *Beyond Ugly* takes up Constance's story from the age of 19. She is in Harley Street in a plastic surgeon's consulting room. She wants her nose done and her lips done and that's just for starters. "'You is ugly,' Eastman [her stepfather] had said. Now, years later, I would have the opportunity to put that right."

Now there may be something of value here, as it gradually dawns on the world that the craving for cosmetic surgery may often be a symptom of severe psychological distress, and that we should pity the likes of Michael Jackson and Courtney Love and Anne Robinson rather than laugh at their awful plastic faces. Promoting the new book on radio recently, Briscoe said she still had the odd nip and tuck and that she still felt ugly, a direct consequence of all that abuse all those years ago.

But is this quite enough to justify another book? You don't read Briscoe for her prose style: this is a very simply told tale, describing almost laboriously what's going on at any one time, with only the occasional flashback to the horrors of the first book to put things in context. Such flat writing may well work when you're describing brutal physical and emotional abuse, but it's less useful for depicting three years at Newcastle University. Along the way Briscoe settles scores with all the people who have done her wrong, which seems to be the way now for all autobiographers, from bad-tempered celebrity chefs downwards. But there's no insight here; not a shred of humour; just the blank-eyed narrative of someone so damaged it's probably a miracle she can get up in the morning and make a cup of tea. As her plastic surgeon said, "'I still don't know what makes you tick, Constance, or who you are.'" Any reader who gets to the end of this dreary book will know how he felt.

There is a sense, anyway, that this seam is close to being worked out. It's been interesting to see in the reviews of Tania Glyde's new book about her alcoholism a vague sense of *ennui*, as though someone drinking enough vodka to flood a small town was no longer quite enough to satisfy the jaded readerly palate. You can see now why the likes of James Frey make half of it up: there's little chance of being noticed otherwise. That's not to say that Constance Briscoe has made any of it up. Her book is, if anything, all too believably boring. O woe, o woe.

"Still 12lbs short of a political memoir"

A Llosa cause

The Bad Girl
Mario Vargas Llosa
Trans. Edith Grossmann
(Faber, £17.99)

AS a novel about erotic obsession, *The Bad Girl* is a curiously lacklustre affair. The narrator, who casts himself as the "good boy" of the story, is a long-suffering (possibly masochistic) doormat, and the "bad girl" is a mechanically sadistic marionette, who pops up in a series of increasingly contrived coincidences to torment him.

She appears first as one of a pair of school girls who arrive in the Peruvian narrator's home town of Miraflores in the 1950s, claiming to have come from Chile. The narrator duly falls for the one called Lily, and is wounded by her careless rejection.

Some years later, living in Paris in the 1960s, he gets involved in helping political radicals from Peru to get to Cuba to be trained as guerrilla fighters. One of them, now going under the *nom de guerre* of Arlette, turns out to be the same bad girl. She submits to his caresses but dumps him in favour of a French diplomat with a Swiss bank account (which she empties) before disappearing.

In subsequent decades he rediscovers her, first masquerading as a horsy English housewife in Newmarket, then as a Tokyo gangster's moll by the name of Kuriko; then back in Paris where he nurses her to health after her traumatic treatment by her Japanese gangster, only to dump him as soon as she's well enough to turn a new disappearing trick. And so it goes, and so he weeps, and so she comes back to haunt him.

As each chapter begins, you wonder at what point in the narrative the creaking machinery will be brought into operation to engineer the inevitable reappearance of the heartless temptress. The narrator is a translator and interpreter, working for Unesco, which is how he manages to find himself in the various different places in the world (Paris, London, Tokyo, Madrid) where, coincidentally, she suddenly and mysteriously reappears.

Each time this happens, the scene is much the same. He notices with a pang the oddly familiar figure. She asks: Are you still mad at me? He sees how elegant and well dressed she is and wonders who's funding her latest lifestyle. She sneers at his poverty and lack of ambition, and chides him into uttering those cheap sentimental things (about love) that seem to turn her on. Then she gazes at him with her dark honey eyes. He's hooked once again and soon they are meeting secretly in some hotel room, where they "exchange saliva" before having quasi-necrophiliac sex. The narrator falls for it every time, yet there is nothing in the story to explain why this should be a grand self-destructive passion, as opposed to simple feebleness of mind.

Nor does one get much sense of what really drives her, the so-called bad girl. She is thin, elegant, heartless, bitchy, with a limited vocabulary of little more than catchphrases. Is she meant to be real, or some kind of archetype?

Some reviewers have compared her to Becky Sharp, the eternal adventuress of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*; but the way her repeated appearances in the novel, lurching from one triumph of the will to the next, in a series of increasingly implausible coincidences, are energetically semaphored miles in advance puts one more in mind of Widmerpool in Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*, or even Widmerpool's vicious nemesis, Pamela Flitton.

The author, Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, is probably best known for his early novel, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, whose annoying "ironic" playfulness at least enabled one not to take its erotic interludes too seriously. Some readers may also know that Llosa once stood for political office in Peru: he was actually a presidential candidate, in 1990, against the successful (but disastrous) Alberto Fujimori (Peru has a large Japanese population, so this is not as surprising as it sounds). However, if Llosa's presidential campaign was as glib and detached as the commentary on Peruvian politics since the 1950s that threads through the narrative in *The Bad Girl*, perhaps his defeat is not so suprising.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S ALL ABOUT CULTURAL DIVISIONS, CONFLICT AND HATRED
MARTIN AMIS THE SECOND PLANE
SOME PEOPLE LOVE AMIS - OTHERS LOATHE HIM

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

How Fiction Works
James Wood,
(Cape, £16.99)

THE house of fiction has many windows, but only two or three doors. Maybe there will be a sauna or a utility room, according to the owner's taste. It depends. W.G. Sebald once said to me: "If I am entering the house of fiction, I like a butler standing on the porch to welcome me in." Most probably he was right. Oh dear, already I am sounding like Adam Thirlwell, if only in Heidegger's sense of "Life is coincidence: coincidence life". As Ford Madox Ford remarks in that rather wonderful footnote to his *Biblia Obscura* (1927), whose presence on my teenage bookshelves furnished me with a great deal of proximate glamour: "He digs deepest, who deepest digs." That second "digs" is really very good.

✦

If this little book has a larger argument it is that fiction is a bit like writing down what you see in front of you and a bit like making it up and that this reliably discreet connection – what Joyce calls "the lifelikeness of unlikened life" – is not such an implacably austere statement of the bleeding obvious as it sounds. So you see, when I am talking about character I am really not talking about character, and when I am talking about the point of view I am really not talking about the point of view, and when I set off on one of my immensely arch rhetorical flourishes – what a piece of writing this is ! – I am really only wondering about the chances of the *Guardian* taking an extract. Ah, but as Horace says, *brevis esse, obscure fio*, and we must move on.

✦

Let us think about this a little. We can tell a great deal about characters from the things they say and the things that are said to them. Were my publisher, Mr Franklin, to say to me "Yes, James, if you really insist, I suppose we could just about publish that dainty little critical book of yours" then it would be possible to make various inferences about his moral salubrity. The same may be said of Flaubert or, at a pinch (remembering Rilke's warning about "the shams of embedded self-hood") Eliot. On the other hand, we may return to Mr Harold Robbins and the description of his heroine Miss Barbara Bedworthy and her "enormous knockers". Is this not an amazing phrase, quite alchemical in its transference, near-incandescent in its metaphorical intensity (reminding one, in its effects, of Baudelaire's "breast-bejewelled" sirens)? We think, perhaps, of door-knockers, but we also think of fullness, of unhindered movement, of the *constant sated imbrication of the genuinely erotic* (cont p 94).

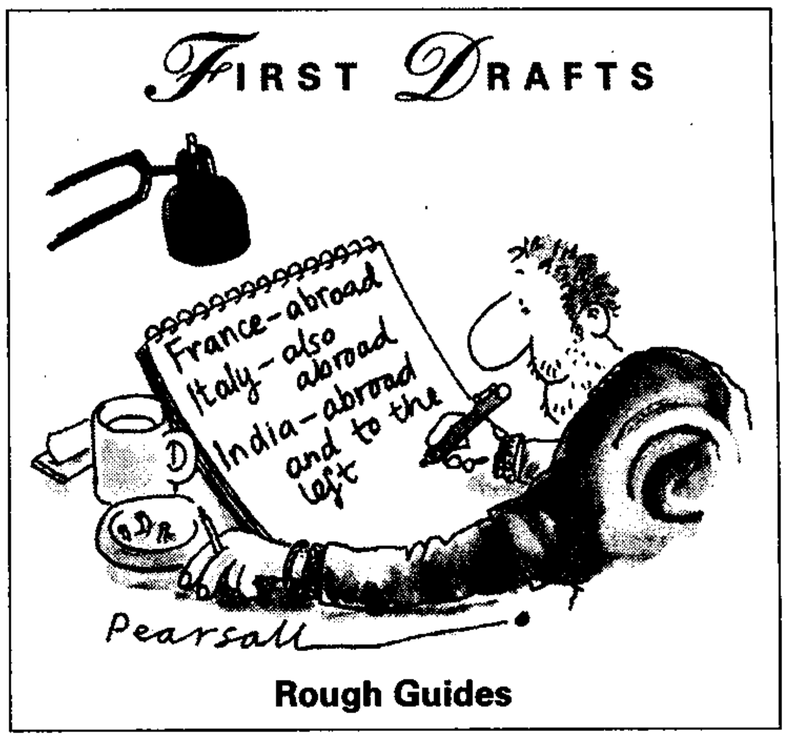
Books & Bookmen

■ SOME clarity has at last emerged on the enigma of how Martin Amis reconciles his stated reading policy ("I only read dead writers") with his £3,000-per-hour role as professor of creative writing at Manchester University.

In the same recent interview which saw him positing that feminism had "lost us Europe" (because Muslims supposedly breed more than "us"), the increasingly Kingsleyesque figure declared that his students are "nice" but he doesn't actually "look at any of their creative stuff". For that, evidently, the university would have to pay real money.

■ THE most surprising of the books submitted by publishers for the Samuel Johnson non-fiction prize is the work of an author who is about to begin a jail sentence. This is not, however, a noble victim of tyranny: it's convicted company-looter Conrad Black, whose 1,100-page Nixon biog is a *faute de mieux* entry from Quercus.

The odds are against even a longlist placing, in a year where the favourites are David Kynaston's austerity-era history, Simon Sebag Montefiore and Rosemary Hill's lives of Stalin and Pugin, and perhaps Robert Macfarlane's *Wild Places*. But who knows? At a time when winning prizes increasingly requires a media-friendly author "story" – agoraphobic Stef Penney; breakdown survivor Anne Enright, stand-up comic, ordained minister and depressive AL Kennedy, etc – he has a more compelling tale than most biographers and historians. And a victory speech by video link from jail would be great telly, wouldn't it?



■ WHY so much publicity for *Meltdown*, a new thriller by obscure financial hack Martin Baker? Simple: as every puff for the book mentions, he is married to City superwoman Nicola Horlick.

But all this attention seems to have persuaded the author he's now a star in his own right. When guests at his launch party in the Royal Academy asked why he was wearing make-up, he explained preeningly that it was because the paparazzi would be out in force and he wanted to look his best.

Alas! Only one snapper, from the *Daily Mail*, turned up. After taking the obligatory photo of Horlick he scoured the room at the Royal Academy searching in vain for any other celebs. He was eventually reduced to photographing his own employer, *Mail* diarist John McEntee, before stowing his camera and heading home for an early night.

■ THE London *Evening Standard*'s new book club offers discounts on books "chosen" by "our literary editor David Sexton", either as "recommendations from 2007" or in his weekly reviews.

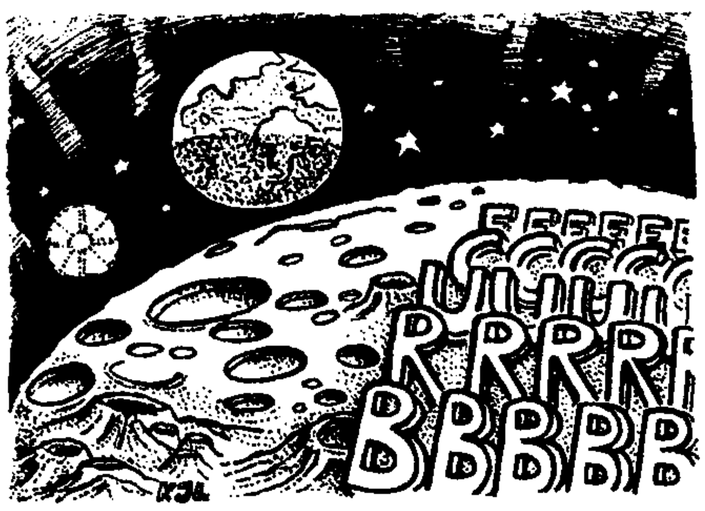
This is a recipe for tension, as Sexton is perhaps best known for his deft hatchet jobs, with terrible books chosen in order to be destroyed. Also, book clubs tend to be middlebrow *à la* Richard and Judy, whereas his tastes incline towards the hyper-literary – one article hailed the famously obscure poet Geoffrey Hill as "the finest English writer alive", and his suggestions for Christmas presents have included Michel Houellebecq, James Lees-Milne and an audiobook of Samuel Beckett's trilogy.

Consisting mostly of last year's highlights, the club's opening line-up is notably highbrow, including Ted Hughes's letters and a study of literary anonymity. But one selection shows the potential for conflict: Russell Brand's *My Booky Wook*. Urging *Standard* readers to shun celebrity "non-books" in November, Sexton singled out Brand's memoir as epitomising "these dismal productions", slating it as a "horrible muddle" and an "outrageous cheat". Now, ostensibly, he's the host of a club that recommends it.

■ AS REPORTED in the last *Eye*, British readers cannot buy Andrew Morton's unflattering new biography of Tom Cruise from Amazon even though it is freely available in the US. As far as the amazon.co.uk website is concerned, it doesn't exist.

Or does it? When an *Eye* reader entered "Andrew Morton" in the Amazon search engine last week, the very first book it offered him – ahead of any others by Morton himself – was a far more sympathetic biography of, er, Tom Cruise by Iain Johnstone!

'Bookworm'



Among the exhibits will be Bruce Nauman's neon sculpture My Name As Though It Were Written on the Surface of the Moon, in which his name is spelled out bbbbbbrrrrrruuuuuuccccccceeeeee.

'Barbican show's alien perspective', *Guardian*

Imperially free and generous as Schnabel's work is, the imagery – medical, erotic, religious – hangs together with enormous power. The birth of Bauby's soul feels like nothing less than the rebirth of cinema.

DAVID DENBY reviews 'The Diving Bell and the Butterfly', *New Yorker*

They were word perfect on a taut 15 Step, clapping along to its bewildering jumping bean rhythm with unnerving accuracy. Thom Yorke threw rave shapes into the light. Beaming its way forward like a speeding snowplough, a sublimely heavy Bodysnatcher saw guitarist Jonny Greenwood oscillating between filigree fretwork and finger-shredding ectoplasmic scree.

PETE PAPHIDES attends a Radiohead concert, *The Times*

Pseuds Corner

I take my last drink on September 11, 2002 – exactly a year after so many things kicked off...

TANIA GLYDE, *Cleaning Up: How I Gave up Drinking and Lived*

'O Dark, Dark, Dark, amid the blaze of noon,' it's the same greeting whenever Daniel and I see each other. It's a line from the Milton poem Samson Agonistes, and for some reason we have quoted to it to each other for the 23 years we have been friends. Perhaps because we both recognise a similar darkness in each other.

HANIF KUREISHI on Daniel Day-Lewis, *Esquire*

CONTRIBUTORS: David Redway, Aindreas O Gallchoir, Dan Kuper, J.R. Smith, Deirdre O'Brien.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

SIR JOHN BOURN

The last supper?

THERE were plenty of stomach-turning encomia to Sir John Bourn as MPs gathered to hear Gordon Brown announce Junketing John's successor as head of the National Audit Office.

"He may be in his 70s, but he has the spark and energy of a man in his 40s," declared public accounts committee chairman Edward Leigh, omitting to mention Sir John's appetite and capacity for overcoming jet lag. Leigh's Tory colleague David Gauke lauded Sir John's "outstanding service in identifying waste" – without drawing attention to his prodigious additions to it.

Labour's Tony Wright, chairman of the Commons public administration committee (which is supposedly concerned with propriety) "regretted very much that [Bourn's] final period in office was distracted by stories of exotic expenses". Apparently the sad thing was the *stories*, not the jaunts themselves – jaunts such as the trip to the World Cup final as guest of the largest IT supplier, EDS, whose failed projects Bourn for some reason refused to look at (see last *Eye*).

The new NAO boss is Bourn's deputy of the last eight years, Tim Burr. And a very welcome addition to the club he is, too. Public accounts commission chairman Alan Williams called him "a delightful and unassuming man" – an odd recommendation for a spending watchdog. Burr is so unassuming, in fact, that in eight years as Bourn's deputy and on the NAO audit committee he didn't assume anything wrong with hundreds of undeclared luxury hotels, trips and freebies. Ministers and officials won't exactly be quaking in their boots.

Reform of the NAO's "governance" is promised soon. But will that produce a watchdog with teeth not rotted by too many free sweets? Don't bank on it.

Sweet FA and the FSA

ONE of Sir John's legendary whitewashes was of the Financial Services Authority last July.

"The FSA has done well... to become one of the world's first unified financial services regulators. In doing so it has created strong and effective structures," he concluded in April. Five months later, unnoticed by the "strong and effective" regulator, Northern Rock hit the wall. The Treasury select committee now takes a slightly different view from Sir John. "The FSA appears to have systematically failed in its duty as a regulator," said its MPs.

PS: The master of regulation conducting the governance review of the NAO is none other than John Tiner, chief executive of the FSA for four years until July 2007 as Northern Rock was building its unsustainable balance sheet under the FSA's radar.

Thought for the week

PUBLIC accounts committee chairman Edward Leigh can always be relied on to give anybody frittering taxpayers' money a good old tongue lashing. But he's been oddly sympathetic to Sir John Bourn since the *Eye* first exposed the auditor-general's gallivanting with his wife in tow at enormous public expense.

Funnily enough, Leigh is one of the 70-odd Tory MPs who also keeps it in the family. His wife Mary is his office manager, salary undisclosed.

INQUESTS

Jury's out... for good?

HIDDEN in the government's new counter-terrorism bill are extraordinary plans to provide for secret inquests in death-in-custody cases.

While attention was duly diverted to home secretary Jacqui Smith's controversial plans to increase detention without charge to up to 42 days, few noticed that the bill would also give her wide-ranging powers to intervene in inquests.

Clause 64 of the bill enables the home secretary to hold inquests without juries and conducted by specially appointed coroners. This is not just for reasons of terrorism and national security... it also cites international relations and "any other public interest" which she sees fit.

In fact, the proposed changes in the law were not triggered by a terrorism case but by that of a young black man, Azelle Rodney (pictured), shot seven times by police in a pre-planned drugs surveillance operation in April 2005. The coroner ruled last year that it was impossible to hold a proper inquest because as the law stands intercept evidence cannot be given in courts, and there was too much "blacked out" material to make any sense of the case.

Rodney's mother had hoped the government's promise to her last November to amend the law to deal with the questions raised in her son's death would enable juries to hear intercept or intelligence evidence in cases where people have died at the hands of the state.

But the government, obsessed with never disclosing intercept material and no doubt fearing that the move would open the door to terror suspects in criminal cases getting similar access, has performed a U-turn. Instead the plans outlined in last week's bill are to make the material available to government-vetted coroners with government-vetted counsel overseeing the "sensitive material". Thus bereaved families, their lawyers and the public at large would be kept in the dark.

The proposals introduced without consultation are drawn so widely that there are fears it could be used in any sensitive inquest, such as that of the innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes, who was gunned down by police at Stockwell tube station in July 2005. Harriet Wistrich, solicitor for the De Menezes family, said she was concerned that the bill provided ministers with the means of withholding material from the family and the public.

Daniel Machover, who represents Azelle Rodney's mother, said the proposals were a travesty. "Presented with the problem of what to do with sensitive material that is relevant to the circumstances of how and why a person was killed by a state agent, the government proposes to remove the vital democratic accountable layer of a jury and hide away from the bereaved family crucial evidence about the death," he said.

Rodney was a passenger in the back of a car which was pulled up in a suburban road in Edgware, north London. He was shot dead, his two companions subsequently convicted of firearms and drug offences and sentenced to seven and six years. In his case, a crucial question for the inquest is why the three were not arrested earlier and possibly in a safer location if, as is claimed, they had been under surveillance for some time.

Inquest, the organisation that campaigns for the families of those whose relatives die while in custody or care, has already protested to ministers. Support is already being gathered in the Lords to fight the proposals.

LEGAL AID CUTS

Bar humbug

RED faces at the Legal Services Commission (LSC), where heavy-handed tactics to impose swingeing pay cuts on barristers have backfired, leaving defendants accused of the most serious crimes without adequate representation.

Last week the LSC refused to say how many of the 2,300 barristers approved to work on cases such as complex fraud, terrorism or murder cases had signed up to new contracts. But sources tell the *Eye* that it is a mere 23 – and some are now regretting it.

Under the contract a QC's daily court fees will be cut from £525 to £476. For non-silks, the fee is down to £285. Now the *Eye* is no champion of fat-cat lawyers; but these fees are less than barristers working in the criminal courts were earning 12 years ago – and far less than the £800 to £1,000-plus a day management consultants are charging to go into health trusts and other public bodies.

QCs and senior counsel, who had already accepted one large cut in fees, were not obliged to take cases that might take them miles from home for weeks with the additional expenses. Yet under the terms of the new contract they will have no choice.

The new contracts were designed to cover all cases lasting over 40 days and others considered of particular importance, dubbed very high cost cases. They should have been finalised last month with the list of approved barristers made available for solicitors to approach for all new cases which fall into this category.

The boycott by the barristers presents the LSC with a problem. Solicitors agree the counsel's rates are impossibly low and it leaves them unable to find the expert barristers they need in these complex cases. No doubt realising a cut too far in fees had got them into a pickle, the LSC made a rather cack-handed threat to the Bar Council, suggesting that an orchestrated boycott by barristers might amount to a criminal offence under anti-cartel competition laws. That simply antagonised m'learned friends even more, prompting the Timothy Dutton QC, chair of the Bar Council, to remind the LSC that it was warned at the outset that the scheme was "unlikely to attract barristers of sufficient skill and experience to make it viable so as to properly service the interest of criminal justice".

Of course cynics at the Bar believe it's all part of the government's plans to move towards the US public defender service, where the accused may get the exceptional dedicated lawyer prepared to work for peanuts, but more usually ends up with the newly qualified or those less able. As one told the *Eye*: "If it is all a ploy to create a two-tier criminal justice system – one for the rich and one for the poor – then sadly it's working."

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£30bn Northern Rock bonds the taxpayer will guarantee under government rescue plan

£30m Profit to hedge funds owning shares in Northern Rock since the announcement of the plan

NATIONAL PARKS

Fraternally yours...

WHEN QinetiQ, the privatised Ministry of Defence research offshoot, wanted to get rid of a redundant military installation on cliffs near the village of Angle, Pembrokeshire, it seemed logical to give first refusal to the Pembrokeshire National Park, which owns the surrounding land.

The 50-acre East Blockhouse site (pictured) was originally occupied by the military as part of coastal defences during the Napoleonic wars, but what remains today is an ugly, flat-roofed brick building that was used to eavesdrop on Russian submarines during the Cold War. A planning report last year described it as "an alien intrusion into the natural landscape... of little aesthetic or architectural value".

Assuming the site would not be of interest to developers because no planning permission would be granted, QinetiQ did not advertise it, instead offering it to the park for between £250,000 and £300,000. On 4 May last year, however, the park's "asset management group", headed by one Gary Meopham, told QinetiQ it was not interested in buying the East Blockhouse site.

The following day QinetiQ, now without a buyer, received an offer of £235,000 for the site, which it accepted. By an amazing coincidence, the offer came from Gary Meopham's brother Mark, a restaurateur from Southampton. Land Registry records show that the sale was completed in September 2007 and that the purchasers were Mark Meopham, his wife Helen, Gary Meopham and his partner Lisa Bowden.

A planning application was then submitted in the name of Lisa Bowden to convert the buildings on the site to four residential units. After this was refused, Bowden applied to convert the redundant MoD buildings to four holiday units.

It was only when this application came before the park's planning committee – with an officers' recommendation of approval – that some members of the park authority became concerned. The park's monitoring officer was called in to investigate. At the end of last month, chief executive Nic Wheeler announced that the monitoring officer had found prima facie evidence that Gary Meopham might have breached the officers' code of conduct. Just fancy that!

Mr Wheeler has therefore decided to take decisive action – ie nothing at all will happen until yet another investigation establishes whether there is any "proof" of wrongdoing.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£60m Amount diverted from Sport England budget

£90m Amount diverted from Heritage Lottery Fund

£110m Amount diverted from Arts Council of England

£150m Amount paid to consultants so far (with four years to go)

TONY STOCK SCANDAL

Fourth time lucky?

LATER this year, legal history will be made when a man convicted 38 years ago of a robbery in Leeds gets a record fourth chance in the court of appeal to clear his name. But when the case of Tony Stock (first reported in the *Eye* 12 years ago – see issue 909) finally comes before m'learned friends, it will be the judges in the public spotlight. Can they finally admit their colleagues have previously got it wrong, not once but three times?

Stock's case is as blatant a miscarriage as one could imagine. He was convicted in July 1970 of being part of gang who robbed a Tesco store. Stock, now 67, was arrested because police said he looked like an identikit picture created by a witness who had caught a brief glimpse of a robber.

The witness was then taken to Stock's house for a "doorstep identification" (something that would not now be permitted). Dodgy identification, coupled with what in the days before tape recordings were called police "verbals", ie officers claiming a defendant confessed to them, formed the only evidence against Stock. But he was convicted and sentenced to 10 years.

Desperately protesting his innocence, he went on hunger strike for three months. But his first appeal in 1971 failed and he completed his sentence a supposed guilty man.

And there the matter might have rested but for the later arrest of a man called Samuel Benefield, a leading member of the so-called "Thursday gang" that had stolen £2.5m in a series of raids. Benefield turned supergrass, giving evidence in no fewer than 15 robbery trials. He also confessed to the Tesco robbery, giving police a detailed and accurate account of the raid and naming his four associates. He had never seen or heard of Stock.

Understandably, Stock believed Benefield's confession would clear his name. The Home Office ordered a police inquiry into the safety of Stock's conviction, which centred on the conduct of the arresting officers. But the police cleared themselves of any wrongdoing, even though it was known that one key officer had been accused but acquitted of taking a £50 bribe in an unrelated matter, and had also faced no fewer than 90 disciplinary charges. The officer retired from the force before the charges were heard.

On the back of the inquiry, however, William Whitelaw, the home secretary in 1981, refused to refer the case back to the appeal court. But 12 years later home secretary Michael Howard was persuaded to order another appeal. Everyone believed Stock would be finally be cleared, but they didn't account for Lord Justice Judge. While the courts had consistently relied on the evidence of Benefield in so many other cases, this time the judges decided he made the whole detailed story up simply to exculpate Stock.

The appeal judges didn't produce a shred of evidence for this hypothesis. There was absolutely nothing to link Stock with any of the gang; no evidence that their paths had crossed while Stock was in jail; and no conceivable reason why Benefield would risk perjury charges for one man when he had dumped on so many others. As for the doorstep identification evidence, Lord Justice Judge said the fleeting glimpse on a wet night "was a short but significant opportunity to observe the assailant".

In 2004 Stock's lawyers had another go. Backed by the new Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), they again highlighted the dangers of the identification evidence, pointing out that the main witness had seen a picture of Stock even before he had drawn up the identikit picture and highlighting how Benefield's account was so detailed, down to the stolen cars involved, it had to be credible.

Once again the court threw out the appeal, questioning the value of the CCRC's detailed dossier, which, they said, did not contain new material.

Undeterred by the criticism, the CCRC has now sent the troublesome case back yet again. This time it has uncovered new material which was not disclosed to the defence, new evidence surrounding Benefield's supergrass evidence, and serious shortfalls in the previous police inquiry into the conviction.

The appeal court trades in terms of convictions being "safe" or "unsafe". As the judges in the case of the men wrongly convicted for the murder of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater once infamously said: "This court is not concerned with the guilt of innocence of the appellants. What really matters is the integrity of the process."

As Glyn Maddocks, Stock's solicitor throughout, said: "The integrity of the process in this case has been found lacking time and time again. The CCRC must be congratulated for recognising that this 38-year injustice, which has cast a shadow long over my client's life, must be put right."

CELL SUICIDE

Prison doesn't work

IT did not take long for 2008 to claim its first suicide of a woman prisoner with a history of mental-health problems. Lisa Marley, a 32-year-old mother who had previously tried to take her own life, hanged herself in Styal, the Cheshire prison with a disturbing history of suicides of vulnerable young women.

Her death while on remand for assault came just days before an inquest jury in Wakefield condemned both the community mental-health provisions and the justice system for failing another young mother. Petra Blanksby, who had been diagnosed with a personality disorder, hanged herself in New Hall prison.

In the four months that the 19-year-old was held on remand on an arson charge (where only she had been in danger), she had made 90 attempts at self-harm. While she was in the prison her son was placed for adoption, triggering what witnesses described as a "blatantly obvious" increase in her pattern of self-injury.

"There was and is no excuse for sending a woman with such severe mental-health problems to prison," says Deborah Coles of Inquest. "On the day Petra committed the offence, she had made attempts to seek help. She should have been in a hospital, not a jail."

Just before Christmas, another inquest jury condemned the lack of adequate mental-health care in Durham prison, which contributed to the death of 20-year-old Louise Giles, a woman diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and with a long history of suicide attempts and self-harm.

In the three months leading up to her death, Giles had tried to harm herself 23 times but had been downgraded to a "basic regime", which meant staff had removed her television and radio, despite knowing these had been a major distraction from the voices telling her to harm herself.

"We believe that on the nights leading up to and including the night of Louise's death she was not appropriately cared for," said the inquest jury. "Signs of emotional distress were overlooked."

Last year a report on vulnerable women in the criminal justice system commissioned by the Home Office following a spate of suicides at Styal concluded: "Prison is not the right place for many damaged and disadvantaged women."

Having found that most women offenders had a history of abuse and mental or other health problems, Labour peer Baroness Corston recommended that custodial sentences should be reserved for only the most severe offenders.

Last week the message about vulnerable women was endorsed in the hard-hitting annual report on the state of our overcrowded jails by chief inspector of prisons Anne Owers, launched at the Home Office. To show how much they cared, not one minister turned up. Not even Maria Eagle, who boasts that she is "ministerial champion for women in prison".

NATIONAL HEALTH CHECK

DIRTY HOSPITALS

Playing silly superbuggers

THE first task facing Gordon Brown's new gobbledegook outfit the Risk and Regulatory Advisory Council (it's supposed to "provide a catalyst for the change we need in the way policy is developed", etc) is to get hospital superbugs under control. But is its chairman Rick Haythornthwaite the right man for the job?

True, Haythornthwaite is managing director of private equity firm Star Capital Partners, which has a lot of experience of hospital superbugs. Unfortunately this experience is not in eradicating them but in breeding them as the owner of several filthy private finance initiative hospitals.

From 2003 until last year Star owned an investment vehicle called the Secondary Market Infrastructure Fund (SMIF), set up to buy PFI contracts that could be squeezed for government-guaranteed cash – great for business but less than great for the hospitals operating under the deals. As the *Eye's* report on a buried National Audit Office report into PFI hospitals revealed (*Eye* 1187), PFI hospitals were significantly dirtier than non-PFI ones.

The problem is exacerbated by the trading of PFI contracts in a "secondary market", demanding the extraction of more cash from the deals, or "sweating the assets" as Tory MP Richard Bacon told Channel 4 reporter Liam Halligan two years ago when shown the plans of one fund. Back in 2004, Paul Foot's *PFEye* special report described the "great PFI sell-off" in which another boasted how its PFI deals would "be actively managed to ensure that ... all operating, financing, tax and accounting efficiencies are identified and extracted". Milk the contracts, in other words.

When services such as cleaning then get neglected to save costs, the problems begin. Last year SMIF-owned Hereford PFI hospital emerged as having the second worst incidence of *C Difficile* infections of all Britain's hospitals. But at least Haythornthwaite's Star Capital did clean up once last year: it sold SMIF, mucky Hereford PFI deal and all, for £927m and several hundred millions in profit!

CASHING IN

Patsy fills her Boots

TONY BLAIR isn't the only one cashing in on his time in government. Former health secretary Patricia Hewitt – she of the extensive health "reforms" – is taking paid employment from Boots the Chemists and the private equity firm, Cinven.

Hewitt will earn £100,000 from the two jobs combined, and both firms can expect to profit from her reforms.

Cinven, for example, bought BUPA's hospitals last July, just six months before it bought Hewitt herself. The hospitals, now renamed "Spire Healthcare", grab NHS patients (and NHS money) through the "Choose and Book" system Hewitt oversaw as a way of getting private health firms on to the NHS payroll.

Cinven invested in the hospitals because it "expected to benefit from a number of favourable trends that underpin the UK's private healthcare market" – namely the increasing sub-contracting of NHS services to privately-run Independent Service Treatment Centres and the like. Cinven also owns Partnerships in Care, an £800m firm providing medium secure mental healthcare, mostly for the NHS.

Boots meanwhile is terribly excited about "innovative" schemes to open NHS health centres in its shops, handing it both captive customers and an intensely valuable NHS "stamp of approval".

Hewitt's two new jobs apparently shocked some elements on the Advisory Committee of Business Appointments. In both cases two committee members dissented from the usual advice that she should wait six months from leaving office before taking up her jobs, presumably because they felt the delay should be longer. She still has to wait the standard 12 months before she can be involved in personally lobbying the government on her employer's behalf. So... just six months to go.

Warner cleans up

PATRICIA HEWITT's new jobs look positively restrained next to the bulging portfolio of one of her ministers and a key reformer of recent years, Lord (Norman) Warner.

As soon as he left the Department of Health a year ago (after four and a half years at Richmond House), Warner became chairman of the London Provider Agency, a body he was instrumental in setting up and which seeks to persuade hospitals to adopt "modernisation" measures such as foundation status.

More lucrative private sector jobs had to wait until the standard 12-month moratorium on lobbying government was just about up. Now it is, Warner has wasted no time getting his snout in the trough. Oddly enough, all the firms for which he will become adviser have been enormously enriched by his own policies as a minister!

Private equity group Apax, joint owner of private health company General Healthcare which won several independent sector treatment centre contracts in recent years, welcomes him. As do three firms that have cleaned up on the £12bn NHS IT programme that Warner was in charge of for more than four years: Deloitte (£15m from the project in 2006/07 alone); DLA Piper (£3.5m that year); and Xansa (£0.5m in the year).

Through his position at the NHS Warner has quite a say on how health budgets are spent, which has not gone unnoticed by anti-bacterial gel supplier Byotrol. Announcing the arrival of its influential new boy, Byotrol's chairman enthused: "his knowledge and insight will play a key role in our drive to promote adoption of Byotrol technology across the NHS". For such a clean product, it doesn't half stink.

HEALTH VISITING

Unkindest cuts

CHILDREN with serious illnesses and mothers with post-natal depression are not being spotted soon enough, thanks to severe health cuts in one of the UK's poorest areas.

In the London borough of Waltham Forest, cases of rickets and degenerative neurological conditions are among the problems that health visitors say are being detected late because they don't have enough staff.

In 2000 the Waltham Forest primary care trust (PCT) had 43 whole-time equivalent health visitors. Now there are now just 26 to deal with a rising number of births.

As recently as 2006, health visitors were able to offer an eight-month review to every child in the area. Now only those on the child protection register or the vulnerable families get this service – and many of them are not being seen within the target date, according to union Unite.

And what is the PCT doing while this is happening? Yes, it has called in the number crunchers – management consultants Meridian Productivity. Last summer, Salford PCT spent £360,000 on Meridian's service – while failing to recruit health visitors to fill the gaps in its service!

MEDICINE BALLS

Give us a scan

"BY 2008, no one will have to wait longer than 18 weeks from GP referral to hospital treatment." So said "new" Labour's NHS Improvement Plan in June 2004. But the definition of "by 2008" is a little blurred.

The key targets are that by March, 85 percent of patients needing hospital admission and 90 percent of those who don't should have a "referral to treatment" time of 18 weeks or less. It isn't until the end of December that it applies to all patients (but only if they want it).

The 18 week website (www.18weeks.nhs.uk/public/default.aspx) has a helpful clock in the top left hand corner (333 days to go!); but many primary care trusts (PCTs) are in despair about how to do it. "Diagnostics" presents a particular challenge. When the target was announced, the waiting time in many areas for MRI scans was two years; but Bolton PCT has somehow managed to get the wait down for all diagnostic tests (apart from the odd six week endoscopy) to two weeks. So how's it done?

Bolton PCT has some experienced, workaholic and ballsy commissioners who were reasonably solvent when they started planning in 2005. Some of their solutions were obvious (getting Royal Bolton Hospital's imaging department to stay open over lunch), others were inspired (instead of pissing off all the consultants by parking a private scanner in the hospital car park, they took it out into the community). They gave GPs direct access to urgent community scans for patients with abdominal pain and breathlessness, so they didn't have to be sent to A&E, kept in overnight and often not discharged for several days.

The growth of community scanning has forced the hospital to improve its service and the PCT can now insist that scans are reported on within four days (often sooner) with a treatment plan that the GP and patients can understand. And they're developing an IT system that allows the scans to be whizzed from hospital or scanner to GP surgery. By December 2007, 99 percent of patients who didn't need to be hospitalized were treated within 18 weeks along with 92 percent of those who did.

Bolton is not the healthiest place to live – the life expectancy is several years less than, say, Dorset – but the fact that a deprived area has achieved such improvement when much of the rest of the NHS (particularly in the south) is still riven by petty, internecine, inter-professional rivalries is extraordinary.

Faster access to diagnostic tests is not a panacea. It's expensive; it encourages doctors to reach for the scanner rather than examine patients; it requires considerable operator skill; there is no mandatory regulation of the sonographers who perform ultrasounds; it throws up anxiety-provoking false results; and it can increase exposure to unnecessary radiation. And under the old "watch and wait" NHS rationing, some patients got better (or gave up) on their own. However, used correctly, a good scan will pick up your cancer, heart failure or leaking aneurysm far more quickly than if you sat at home waiting for the PCT and hospital to finish squabbling over who should be doing the scanning. So well done Bolton. Lord Darzi should pay them a visit.

M.D.

In the City

ONE reason for the persistent failure of Gordon Brown's business-friendly, don't-scare-the-greedy, "light touch" regulation policy – manifested in the Northern Wreck fiasco – is that his creation, the Fundamentally Supine Authority, is haemorrhaging experienced staff to those it regulates, such as City banks and brokers and their advisers.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that between 2005 and last year the FSA's supervisory staff fell by 14 percent from 807 to 695 while enforcement numbers dropped twice as much, by 28 percent from 243 to 175. Across the board in the three main supervisory groups – wholesale, major retail groups (which covers Northern Wreck) and retail – there were falls in staff numbers – 12 percent in retail, 15 percent in wholesale and 19 percent in major retail groups.

The loss of senior officials – managers and heads of department – appears even greater. There the totals fell from 48 to 34 in wholesale and from 21 to 15 in major retail groups. These are the kind of losses no regulator can sustain and remain effective. The losses at all grades in enforcement were 33 percent to 39 percent, with the biggest fall among the lowest grades, associates – down from 135 to 82. Managers fell from 31 to 20.

"Is it possible to invest my savings with someone who doesn't employ Tony Blair?"

According to FSA insiders, of the three officials assigned to monitor Northern Wreck only one was constantly in place during the run-up to the crisis, while the two most senior officials were leaving or planning to leave, resulting in little effective supervision or management.

Most of these trained, experienced FSA officials go to work for City firms in compliance departments for twice to three times their salary, using what they learned at the FSA against their former employer. FSA officials at senior associate level in the supervision departments have a basic salary range of £40,000-£80,000, their managers £60,000-£105,000, and heads of department £85,000-£170,000. The figures for senior associates and managers in enforcement are slightly higher.

But figures also released by the FSA reveal that at the end of 2007 there was not a single manager or head of department in the supervision or enforcement divisions who was on the top salary! Even these unachieved top FSA salaries pale in comparison with what can be earned in the private sector by those they are paid to regulate.

No surprise, therefore, that a recent staff survey reputedly revealed that almost 50 percent of FSA staff who responded were thinking of leaving within the next 12 months! Those who work near FSA Towers in Canary Wharf talk of endless, expensive leaving parties. Those who leave are usually replaced by less experienced graduates and time-servers. This makes the FSA not a regulator to fear for big firms but one to bully.

This is most often seen, say former FSA insiders, in a vital aspect of its regulatory role – the ARROW risk-assessment procedure. This was a key feature of how the FSA pretended to regulate Northern Wreck – "a high-impact bank under close and continuous supervision", as chief executive Hector Sants described it to MPs on the Treasury select committee.

Unfortunately the 100 or so "high-impact" banks only get an ARROW visit once every three years. In the case of Northern Wreck its last visit, it seems, was in January 2006 – 18 months before it sank under the weight of its own mismanagement in full view of the FSA.

Sants, who may be fortunate to hold on to a job he has only held since last July, admitted to the highly critical MPs that a three-year gap was "inadequate".

But that is only one of the shortcomings of ARROW procedure, according to former FSA insiders. They say the visits are well flagged and by appointment, giving banks ample time to prepare for the inspection. In some cases this results in loan files being "cleaned up" or "sanitised" before the FSA arrives. Often the bank decides which files the FSA sees, rather than files being chosen at random.

Banks are coached by consultants, often employing former FSA officials, in how to handle the regulator and how to respond to awkward ARROW queries. And always lurking in the shadows is the threat of high-powered lawyers quick to challenge any requirement or tactic.

Its creator, Gordon Brown, through his stooge Chancellor Alistair Darling, wants the FSA to remain as the guardian of the nation's banks, despite the Treasury committee's withering verdict last month that it "systematically failed in its duty as a regulator" over Northern Wreck. As this proved, "light touch" all too often has come to mean "don't touch".

THE ease with which Société Générale and French regulators were able secretly to defuse over a period of six days last month the €50bn (£30bn) bomb built by its rogue trader Jerome Kerviel disproved one of the main excuses for the Treasury, the Bank of England and the FSA for their inability to mount a covert operation to save Northern Wreck four months before.

As the Tripartiteers told the Treasury committee, EU law and UK stock market regulations made such a solution impossible. The Bank governor Mervyn King preferred that course but was persuaded by the FSA that it could no longer be done the old-fashioned way. An announcement had to be made – especially once the news leaked. No secret lifeboat could be launched. No weekend takeover accomplished as with Johnson Matthey.

Northern Wreck was different from SocGen in several ways. But the French bank also faced meltdown if it had not been able to unwind Kerviel's massive bad bets on three stock market indices. The exposure was greater than the value of the bank. So it made no announcement, not even informing the otherwise preoccupied President Sarkozy, until the market operations were finished three dealing days later.

The Banque de France and the French FSA, the AMF, knew but accepted that it was more important that one of France's biggest banks was saved than that rules – always for the guidance of wise men and the obedience of fools – should be slavishly followed. By the time the outside world knew the positions had been unwound – taking the losses from €1.5bn (£1.1bn) to €4.9bn (£3.6bn) – a €5.5bn (£4bn) emergency rights issue was in place.

Had a similar Gallic approach been pursued with Northern Wreck, together with a temporary halt to share dealings, it is possible a cheaper solution to the taxpayer than a £50bn-plus loan/guarantee bill might have been possible. After all, Northern Wreck was effectively bust and remains so without the taxpayer's support, so shareholders would hardly have been disadvantaged. Instead, the hedge funds and others have speculated on the government's desperation to avoid confrontation. Certainly there would have been less likelihood of panic in the High Street.

However, not only was there no such plan B, but the regulators were persuaded by the lawyers that it could not happen. Presumably similar comments made during the SocGen crisis were treated as missing the point – a major bank needed to be saved and the country's financial reputation was at risk. But then the French are always far more pragmatic when it comes to policy issues and less enslaved by the law and those who so profitably peddle it.

European Commission officials have since confirmed that the EU market abuse directive does not prevent covert support – as insisted by the FSA and Northern Wreck. And last week, post-SocGen, Brown and Darling proposed that such covert rescue operations should be possible by the Bank in the future. But that is more than a day late and £50bn short.

THE Treasury committee's well-produced assessment of the Northern Wreck fiasco missed two important points.

It says there is a dispute as to how serious the rescue takeover offer made by an unnamed High Street bank (Lloyds TSB) was, and how much and on what terms the bidder wanted to take Northern Wreck away.

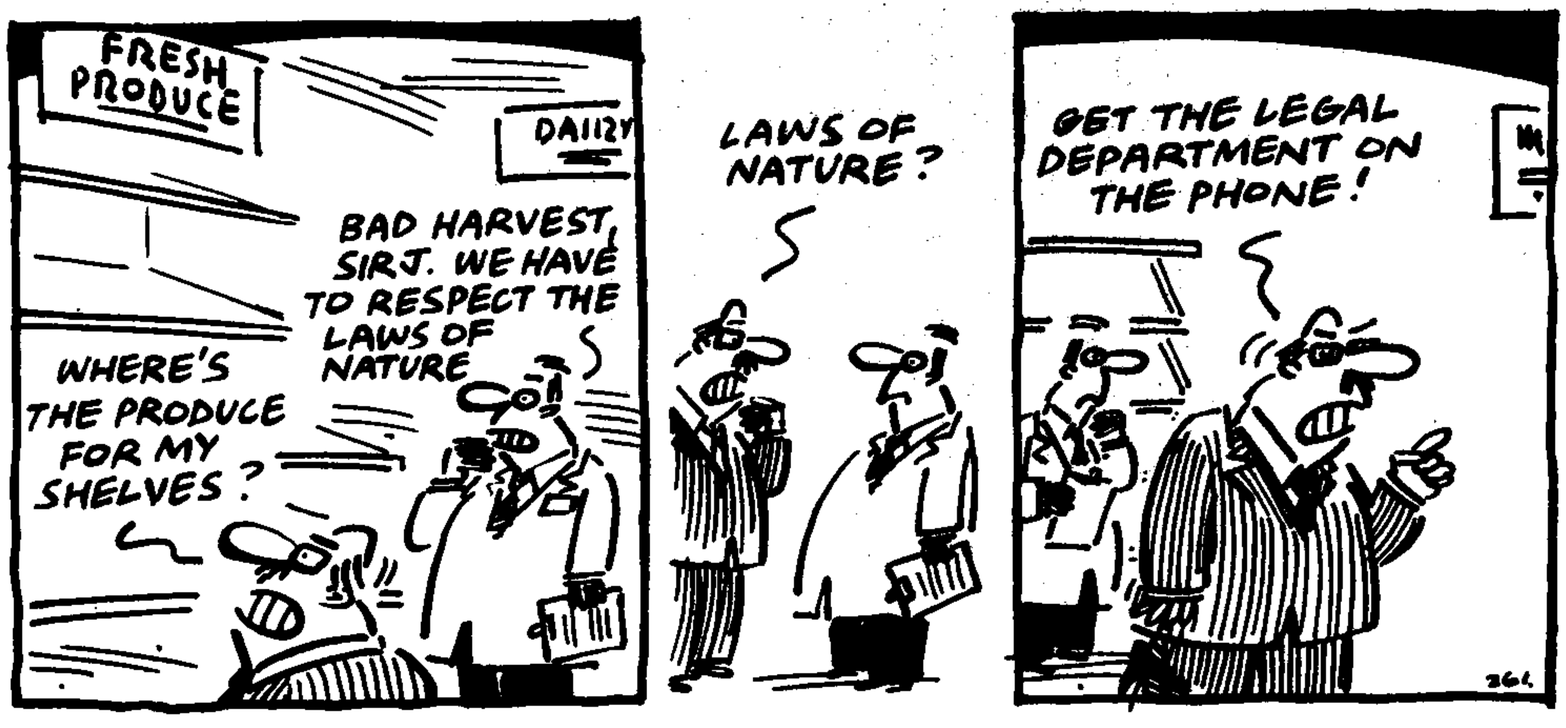
If it was a £30bn loan or facility over two years on non-penal terms, it would have been a better deal for the taxpayer, as the MPs admit. The weekend announcement of an agreed bid would have halted the run. The MPs say the Northern Wreck directors and the Bank and FSA give different versions. So why was Lloyds TSB not asked to give evidence and resolve the issue?

The committee never seems to have asked or been told how much Chancellor Darling and his boss believed they were in for when they agreed on 13 September to provide "a little short-term support". The suspicion is nothing remotely like the £25bn-plus they have so far loaned – and which has no guarantee of repayment as yet – together with up to £30bn more in guarantees lasting for up to five years. All dependent on who, if anyone, wins the beauty contest that closed this week.

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


FRESH PRODUCE
DAIRY
BAD HARVEST, SIR J. WE HAVE TO RESPECT THE LAWS OF NATURE
WHERE'S THE PRODUCE FOR MY SHELVES?
LAWS OF NATURE?
GET THE LEGAL DEPARTMENT ON THE PHONE!

TIMING is everything in the City. So on the very day, 19 January, that the *Financial Times* led with "New Star is hit by turmoil", revealing that almost £2bn was being withdrawn by investors from the former high-flying management group's funds, its personal finance section carried a topical full-page advertisement. "A galaxy of star managers in one star fund", it proclaimed. The fund – New Star Active Portfolio.

Then, a week later, it happened again. A day after the news of M Kerviel's €5bn hole in SocGen, the section carried another timely ad asking: "Isn't it time you discovered SG Covered Warrants?" "Strictly limited downside," declared the ad. Wasn't that what Kerviel's bosses thought they had?

RUMOURS are growing that BAE Systems is looking to follow the Siemens example and negotiate its way out of a corruption prosecution by the US authorities.

The German industrial giant is talking to both the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Justice Department about a possible $1bn fine over its admitted bribery around the world. In return it would probably admit to technical offences but see no suits in court and would be able to continue doing business in the US.

A similar deal for BAE would enable it to resolve the little matter of the payments to its

Saudi ally, Prince Bandar, and the history of Al-Yamamah kickbacks, bribes and entertainment while preserving its ability to sell weapons in its growing US market.

Such a deal would also enable the US authorities to get around the refusal so far of the Home Office to allow the Serious Farce Office to assist the American investigation, with the SFO having been forced to drop its own or see BAE lose the latest Saudi Typhoon order.

A DECISION is expected later this month on the new SFO director to succeed Robert Wardle, who steps down in April. There is said to be a shortlist of four candidates including a QC, two senior white-collar crime specialist lawyers and a civil service prosecutor. Among the names mentioned are former fraud prosecutor Linda Dobbs, who became the first black High Court judge in 2004; lawyers Ian Burton from Burton Copeland – no stranger to SFO cases – and James Bagge from Norton Rose (a former SFO official currently defending in its NHS generic drugs prosecution), plus a prominent Revenue official. Since its formation 20 years ago, the SFO director has alternated between male solicitors and female barristers, so a woman could be next.

Whoever attorney-general Baroness Scotland chooses is in for a rough ride as morale at the SFO is said to be low and going lower. The new director will also have to agree to implement a series of reforms designed to up the SFO's game, contained in a report from former New York prosecutor Jessica De Grazia that is soon to be finalised. And nobody yet knows whether the long-term plan is to roll the SFO into SOCA – the Serious Organised Crime Agency – which still needs to prove its worth.

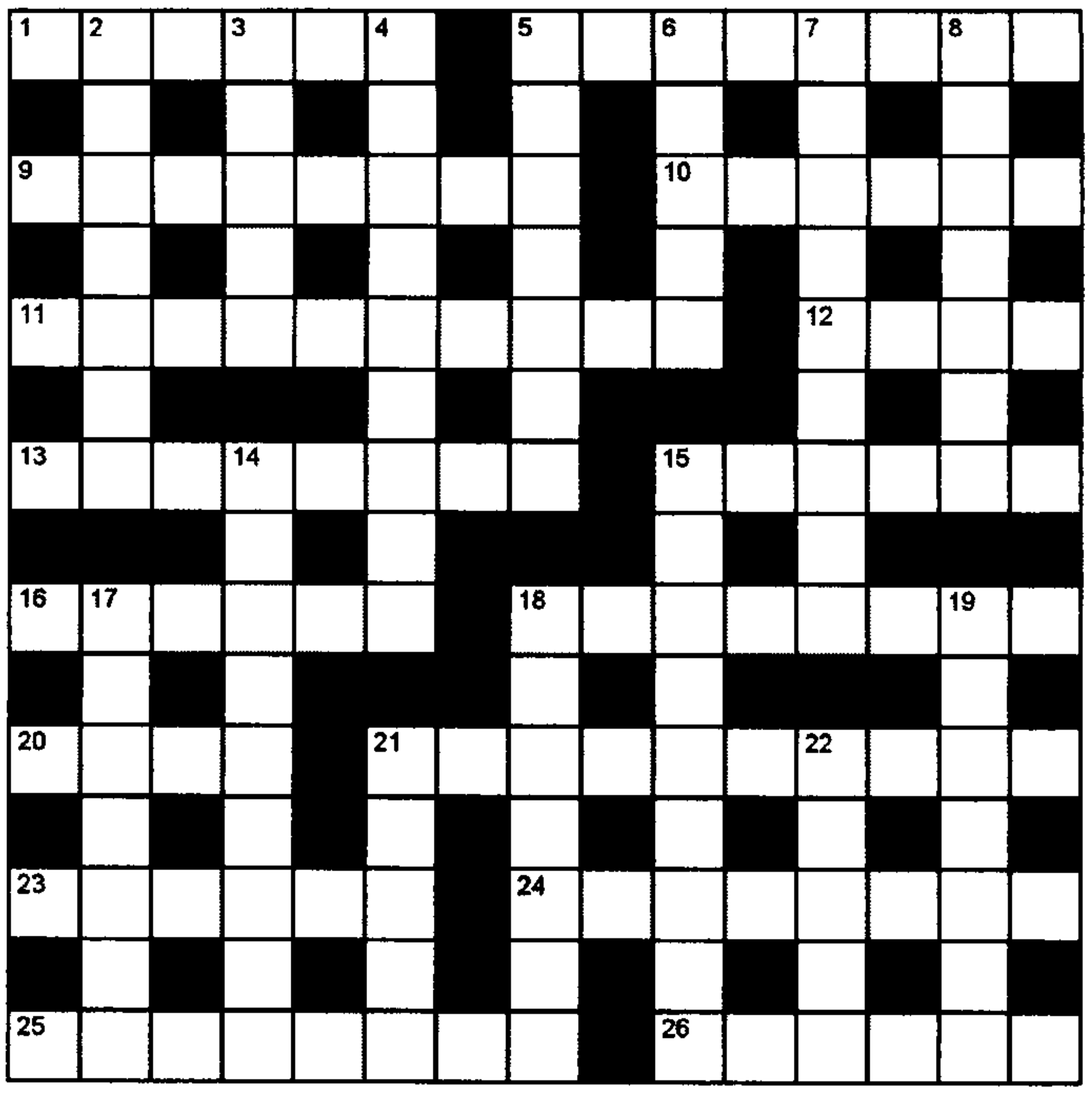
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 358

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 15 February 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Crap seats (6)
5 See 2dn.
9 Parking arse on sink is an embarrassing boob (8)
10 Saved getting buggered without Cyclops to give guidance (6)
11 Mirror will reveal whom you most fancy in this state (10)
12/15 Sailors, getting up to it, come to embrace one (4,6)
13 Improving? Stupid, effing DIY? F-off! (8)
15 See 12ac.
16 Hold your tongue on shit, dickhead! (6)
18 Before shag, topless dame reveals means of slowing you down (4,4)
20 Bogey man's butt squeezed by piss artist (4)
21 Old tax article found in wrinkled testes after getting end away, being on the job (6,4)
23 Short person from the continent she's screwed once more (6)
24 Shade sailors getting dirty (4,4)
25 Getting on with purgative sailors (3,5)
26 Brenda: "One gets in flipping cross mood" (6)

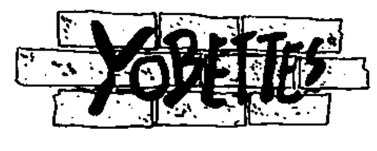
DOWN

2/5ac. "Sailors with things that tickle" smears (4,3,8)
3 Circle photo in which Thatcher's head appears to be Eye-related (5)
4 Broad humour is socks being put on second (9)
5/18 Sailors acting pissed not welcomed by TV bosses (7,7)
6 Foreign article embedded in member? Then raise it! (5)
7 Attempt shag – ace hit (4,1,4)
8 Lover's lost energy, so have another go at the crossword (7)
14 Perfect, unlike a large slice of California? (9)
15 Do it again – takes second to have slapper on her back? (5,4)
17 Not much in Hammersmith and Fulham (7)
18 See 5dn
19 Publisher ballsed up the menu (7)
21 Woman gets tense and hot when grabbed by slippery type (5)
22 Remove listening device from old tit (electronic key implanted) (5)

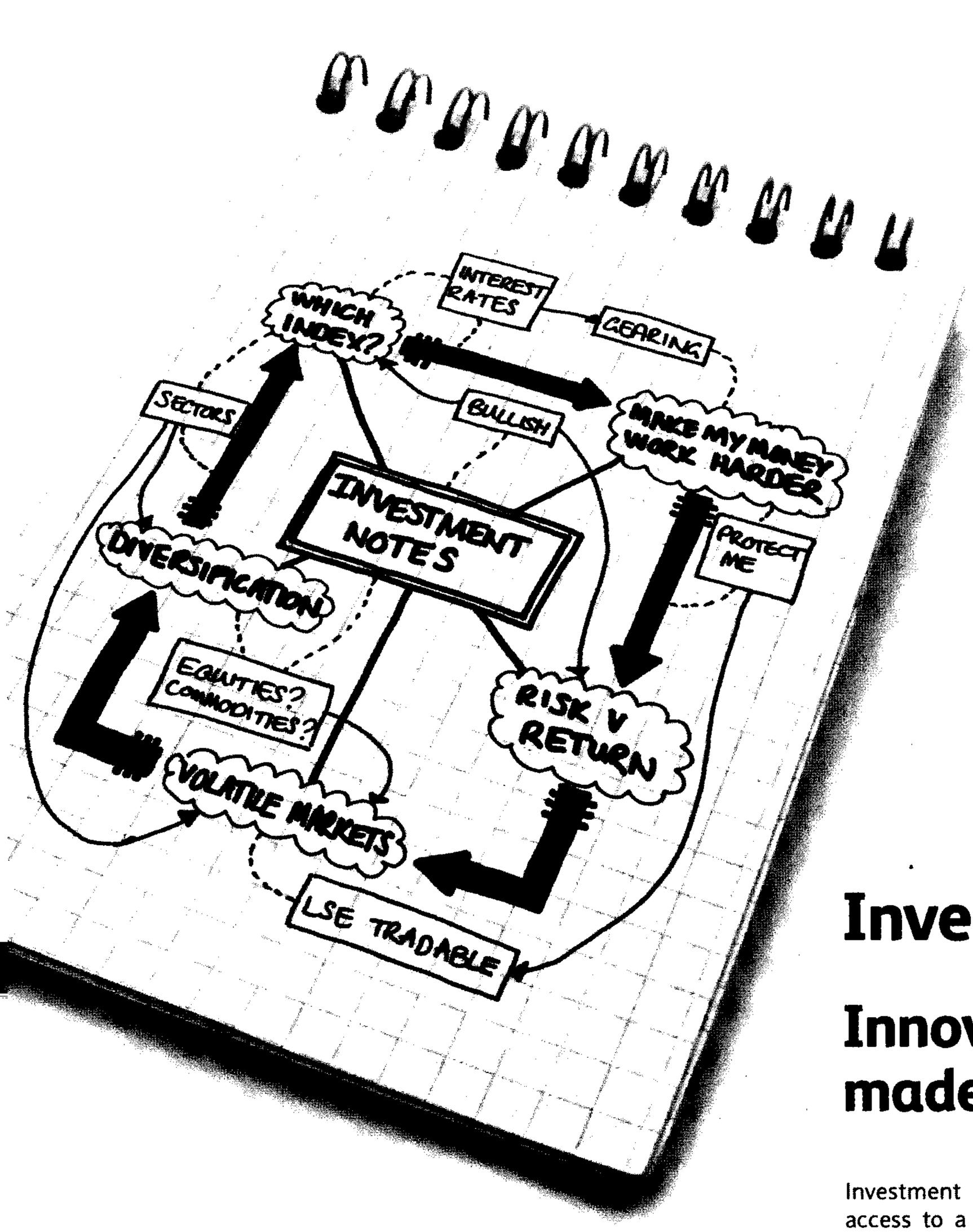
Crossword 357 winner: ROBERT ADAMS

ACROSS: 7 Earthman 9 Chalet 11/12/13D/23/19 Rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic 13 Ditto 14 Parkhurst 16 Carve-up 18 Bugatti 20 Castrates 25 Public funds 27 Rouble 28 Dutch cap.

DOWN: 1/24 Peerage 2 Charioteer 3 Catnap 4/25 Shagpile 5 Ulster 6 Utter tripe 8 Reactor 10 Midrib 15 High office 17 Puts by 21 Spew up 22 Slip-up 26 Saps.



HUSBAND



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EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR THE PEOPLE OF GAZA

MAP
MEDICAL AID FOR **PALESTINIANS**

Fuel sanctions have plunged the people of Gaza into darkness. They must now survive without electricity for up to fifteen hours a day. Reserves of fuel to run hospital generators are all but exhausted.

The fuel cuts have exacerbated an already desperate humanitarian situation created by two years of siege, military incursions and the closure of its borders. Gaza's economy has been devastated, people's livelihoods have been destroyed, their human rights are under attack – and the beleaguered health care system is on the verge of collapse.

Three out of four people now rely on food aid to survive. Chronic malnutrition is becoming commonplace. People are becoming sicker and there is a desperate shortage of drugs and medical supplies with which to treat them. At the same time patients desperately seeking medical care outside of Gaza are frequently denied permission to leave.

Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) is one of the few humanitarian aid agencies that retains a permanent presence in Gaza and today we need the support of Private Eye readers to help reduce people's immediate suffering – and to pre-position emergency medical and food supplies as it seems highly unlikely that the situation will improve in the immediate future.

Please will you help by sending a donation of £30 which will provide a family with a food package containing basics like rice, sugar, lentils, olive oil and corned beef?

In the longer term MAP will continue to support projects such as providing Palestinian people with access to clean water, caring for the disabled and giving psychological support to children traumatised as a result of exposure to violence. But today your help is needed to provide families in Gaza with food, supply medicines and equipment to hospitals and pre-position further essentials to respond should the situation deteriorate further.

Stocks of medications, antibiotics, syringes, intravenous solutions, suture sets and blood-testing needles are perilously low. Dialysis machines need repair and spare parts. Many essential drugs and medical supplies are at zero availability. Without immediate supplies of drugs and medical equipment it is inevitable that patients will die unnecessarily.

Our immediate priorities include the provision of benzine powered generators – costing £1,863 each. Since Israel limited power supplies, health facilities can no longer rely on the continuous power supply which is essential if they are to properly care for their patients.

Anything you are able to give today will, without doubt, help to save people's lives.

© Photo supplied by Ma'an Images

Medicines, medical equipment, food and humanitarian supplies are urgently needed in Gaza today.

Your donation of £30 could help provide a family with a food package to last three weeks

£80 could provide Haemiodialysis Powder for sixteen renal patients to receive an essential course of dialysis

An especially generous donation of £373 would be a significant contribution towards purchasing the benzine generators which could keep hospital patients alive in the months ahead.

With your support, over the coming weeks and months MAP will continue to do all we can to help meet the urgent needs of Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza. **Thank you.**

Donate now: call 0207 226 7691 or visit www.map-uk.org

I will help MAP to provide life-saving food and medical supplies to Gaza

Please fill in this form, place in an envelope and return your completed form postage free to: Medical Aid for Palestinians, 33a Islington Park Street, FREEPOST ND6445, London N1 1BR. Thank you.

I would like to make a donation today of ☐ **£30** ☐ **£80** ☐ **£373** ☐ **My own choice of amount is** £ ____

☐ **I enclose a cheque made payable to Medical Aid for Palestinians OR** ☐ **Please charge my Visa/MasterCard/Maestro/CAF card**

Card no. ____ **Valid from** ____ **Expiry date** ____

Security code ____ **(the last 3 digits on your card's signature strip)** **Issue no. (Maestro only)** ____

Signature(s) ____ **Today's date** ____

Title: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Other **First name** **Surname**

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We would like to keep in touch with you to give you information about our work and how you can help. If you don't want to receive this please tick this box. ☐
Medical Aid for Palestinians will not forward your details to any third parties. Registered Charity no. 1045315 **PI0308**

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☐ I am a UK taxpayer and would like Medical Aid for Palestinians to treat all my donations from 6th April 2001 as Gift Aid donations until further notice.

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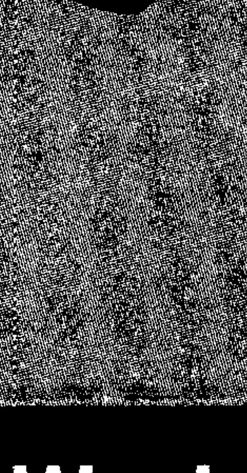

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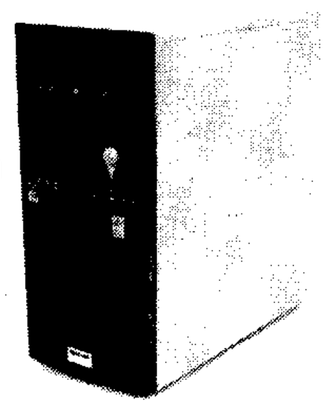

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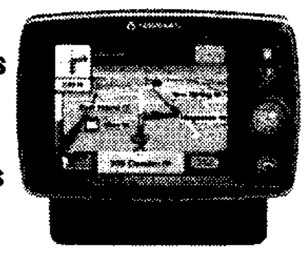
Warranty: 1 year warranty



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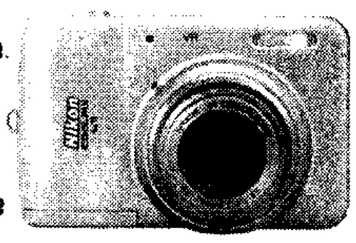

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- **Intel Core 2 Duo T5300 (2 x 1.73GHz),**
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- **Wide range of stations, scrolling display**
- **20 presets, clock, kitchen & sleep timers**

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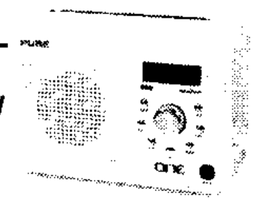

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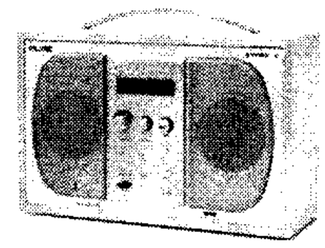

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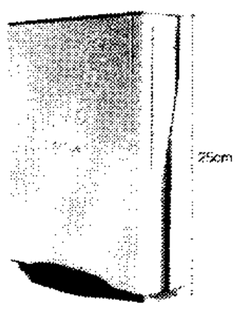

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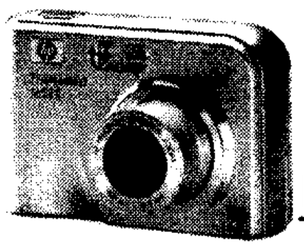
- **7 shooting modes, auto flash**
- **Movie mode with sound, SD slot**

Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty



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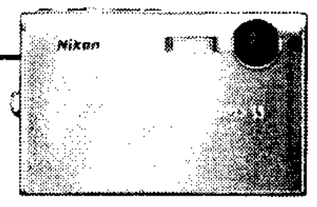
Grade A stock, 6 month warranty



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- **Record up to 40 hours, pause & rewind TV**
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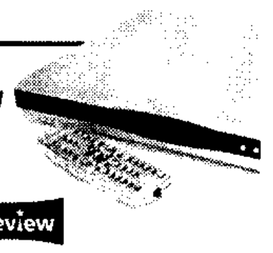

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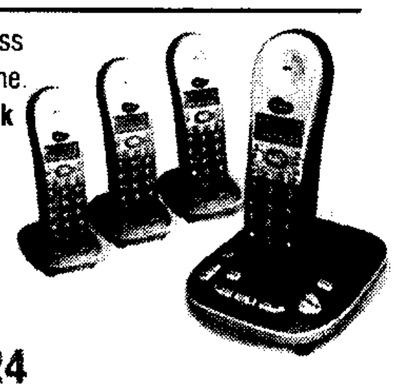
- **3 additional charger bases**

Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty



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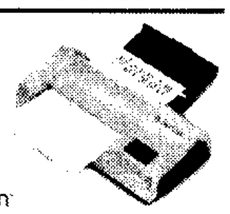

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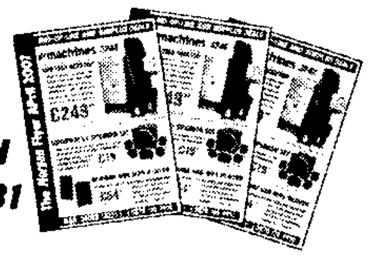

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AUDREY, you are and will always be the LOML! LvB

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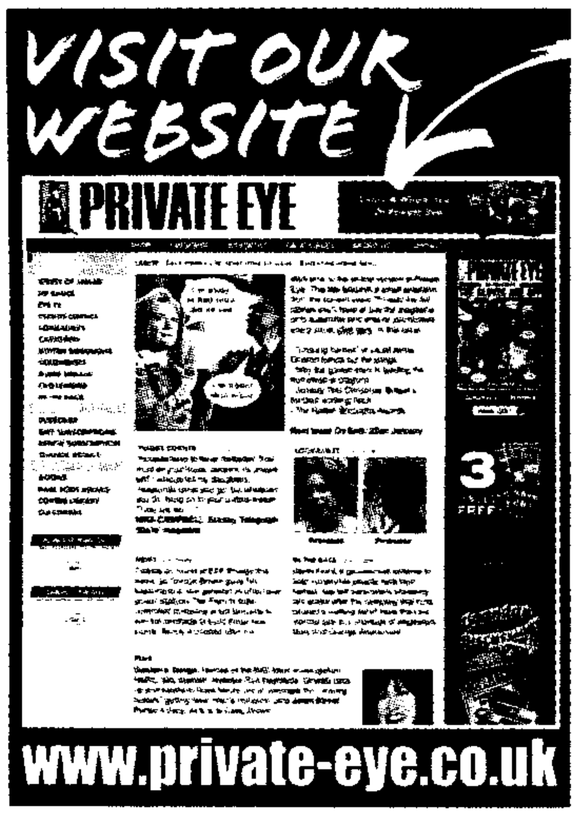

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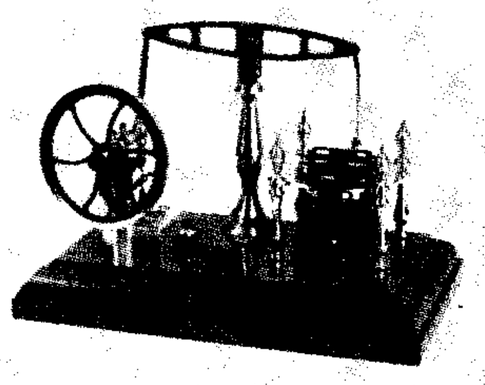

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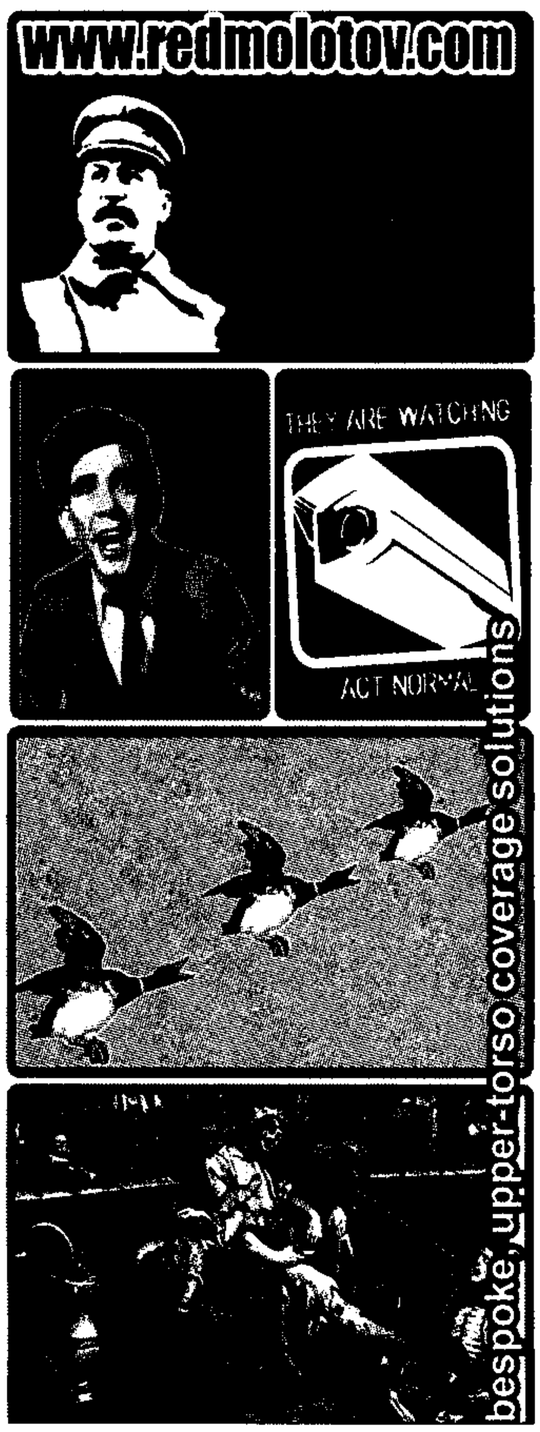

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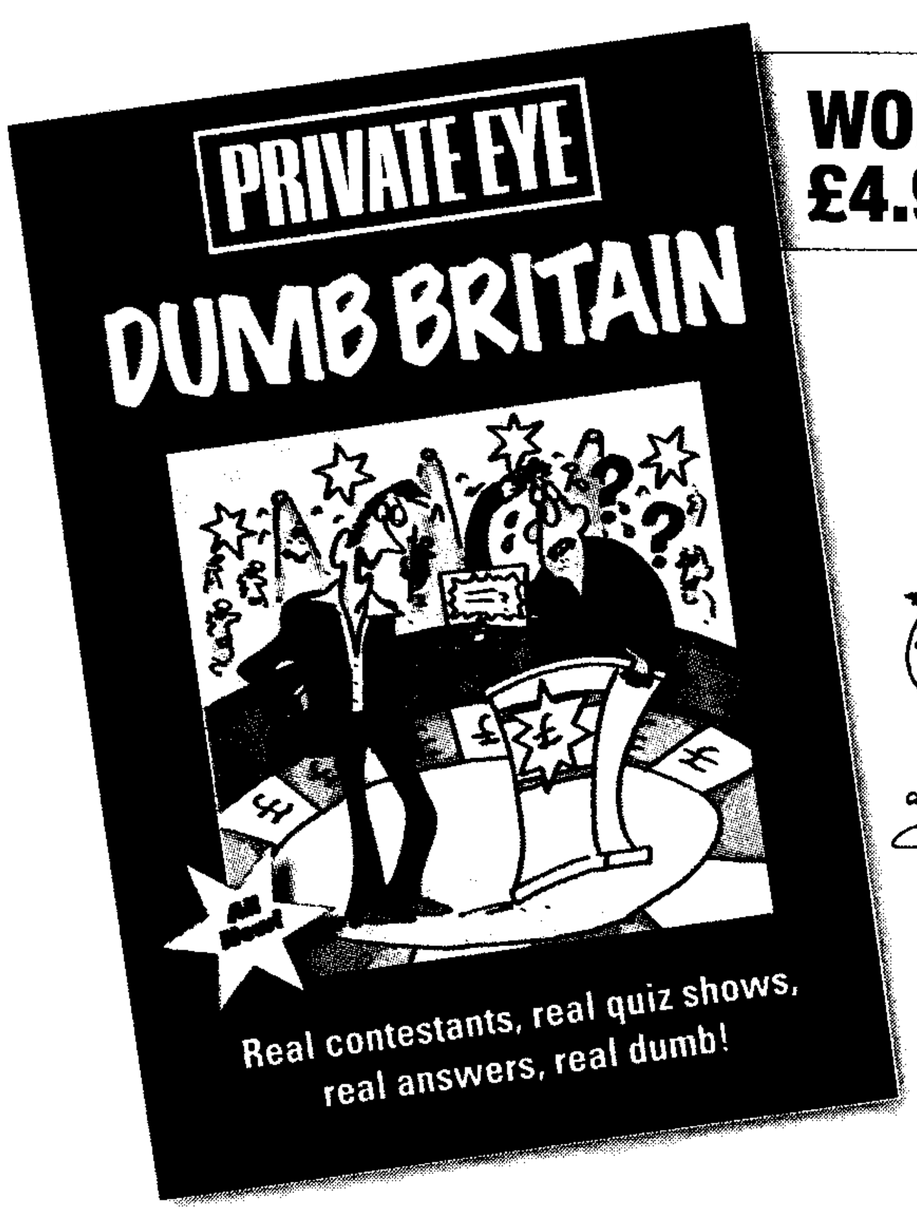

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CONTESTANT: Scuba diving.

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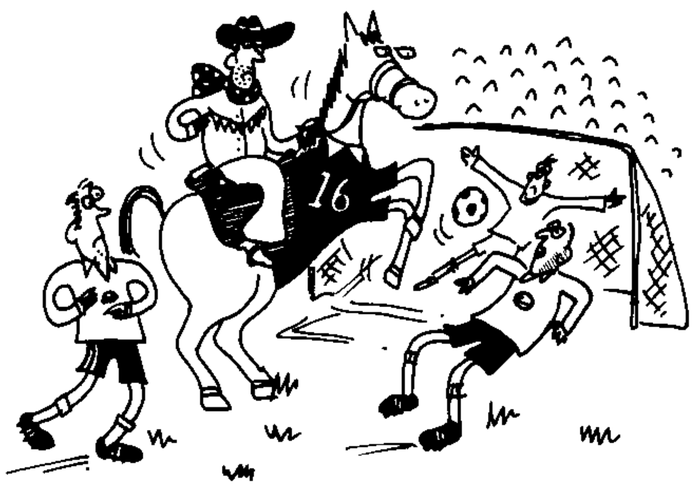

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Official Govnt. Environmental test data for Saab 9-3 Saloon range - Fuel Consumption in mpg (litres/100km): Urban Cycle 16.7-39.2 (7.2-16.9), Extra urban 39.2-64.2 (4.4-7.2), Combined 26.2-52.3 (5.4-10.8). CO_2 Emissions in g/km: 147-259.

Model shown is Saloon Aero 1.9TTiD OTR £26,470 plus optional ALU73 18" 10 spoke alloy wheels at £800.